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# THE LADDER OF GOLD.

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## BOOK THE THIRD.

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### CHAPTER I.

CONTAINING THE ADVENTURES OF A LADY OF TITLE.

TOWARDS the centre of that straggling line of fine mansions called Park-lane, there is one house presenting so peculiar a *façade* that everybody familiar with the place must have a distinct recollection of it. A house that challenges special notice in this locality may be presumed to be somewhat remarkable in its style of architecture, for of all the fantastical clusters of the far west of London, Park-lane is the most singularly diversified in the character of its structures. Every house is built after a plan of its own: one looks in, another looks out; one is tall, another

broad; and they are so irregular in height and outline that they seem as if they were all getting up out of bed at different hours in the morning, some not being yet quite up, while others are yawning and stretching themselves.

The particular house to which we allude is built in the form of a series of semicircles, like so many towers cut in two and clasped round by a lofty balcony whose trellis work ascends nearly to the roof. Why houses are thrown into such shapes cannot be determined by reference to any known principles of use or beauty. There is no way of accounting for the incongruities of architects. They have their dreams, we suppose, like the poets; and failing to establish a reputation by legitimate means, they seek notoriety by eccentricities. Hence, perhaps, if it be not an original default of taste or education, they commit their genius to a freak every now and then in the way of a building, which, lying waste from sheer exuberance, passes at last into the common by-word of Mr. Such-a-one's Folly. Thus we have seen minarets and pointed arches, flying buttresses, Swiss windows, corbels, and Egyptian door-ways mixed up in a chaos so bewildering that it becomes a matter of curious speculation how the architect could

have planned it or the builder built it without losing their senses on the spot.

Our house in Park-lane does not exhibit any such alarming confusion of styles or ages; but it is so unlike all other houses that if it were not for the magnificent damask with which the windows were draped at the date of our narrative, the costly plants that graced the balcony, and the tone of high comfort and embellishment which pervaded its appointments, one might have supposed, from the queerness of the exterior, that it was erected for any other purpose in the world rather than that of residence.

The interior was very gorgeous. We will beg of the reader, however, to furnish it after his own fashion. Let him choose his own chintz, his own or-molu, chandeliers, and mirrors, and crowd the stairs to the top with liveried lacqueys. He will do it better than we can. We should only weaken the general effect by getting up an inventory out of the great upholstery establishments of the West End. But in order that he may be enabled to do proper justice to the grandeur of the furniture and decorations, he must be apprised that the first artists were employed, and that the expenditure was worthy of a palace.

Great ends demand great means; and the splen-

dours of this house in Park-lane must be regarded as a part of the machinery by which stupendous ulterior projects were to be accomplished. It was a season of gigantic bubbles, and the Priests of the mystery required grand Temples for the performance of their rites.

Looking back calmly upon the extraordinary revolutions of fortune that occur in moments of popular excitement, we are apt to treat the most literal picture of them with incredulity, as if it were a gratuitous exaggeration. When the collapse sets in men find it so difficult to live by the most patient and watchful industry, they find the struggle so severe and the results so doubtful or inadequate, that they can hardly bring themselves to believe in the miracles worked by individuals during a period of frenzy and delusion. But the said miracles become intelligible, if we bear in mind that it is not so much by any power inherent in himself that the magician works, as by the ductility of that material of gaping credulity upon which he operates. It is not to the Prospero of the prevailing mania we are to ascribe the enchantments of the potent spirits he calls up, but to the spirits themselves who are so foolish as to come at his call. If the spirits would only resist his

invocations, we should have fewer miracles of gold to perplex our faith in the equity of human affairs. No man, by the mere force of his own genius, could effect revolutions of this description in society, if society did not place the divining rod in his hands, and voluntarily prostrate itself before the sorcery by which it is first dazzled and then duped.

The fame of Richard Rawlings' railway speculations preceded him to the metropolis. Railways at that moment occupied more attention than any other topic, foreign and domestic, that was before the country, because everybody hoped to make money by them. A collegiate education, and the advantages of birth or fortune, which commonly facilitate the progress of a man in Parliament, were not necessary in railway legislation. Business habits, and a practical knowledge of the subject, were infinitely more important. This was fortunate for Richard Rawlings. Had he gone into Parliament in ordinary times, the chances of acquiring distinction would have been as much against him as they were then in his favour. He entered the House of Commons as a great authority on the paramount question of the day, and his appearance at the table to take the oaths produced so marked a "sensation," that the members



stretched out their heads on all sides to look at him. He was at once invested with a sort of appellate jurisdiction upon railway matters, and as his influence increased in the House, it extended a hundred-fold out of doors. Railway-boards scrambled to get hold of him; all the engines of intrigue were put in motion to secure his alliance, or propitiate his favour; and irresistible temptations in the way of allocated shares, patronage, and pickings, were tendered to lure him into the directories. His name was a tower of strength, and wherever it appeared the shares were instantly quoted at a premium, that made the grovelling world at his feet look up to him with a feeling of confidence, not such as men repose in the known and tested powers of their fellow-men, but such as a slavish superstition accords to Juggernaut or Joss.

The stakes in this fierce game rose with the excitement. Where Richard Rawlings had formerly played for hundreds, he now played for tens of thousands. Large funds were under his control, and at his own irresponsible disposal. Nobody questioned his sagacity or integrity. Whatever he touched turned to profit, and the mines of wealth he ploughed seemed illimitable and inexhaustible.

The change in the life of Mrs. Rawlings was like

that of a person who, falling asleep in a hovel, dreams of golden palaces and ambrosial feasts; or, like the conjuration of the last scene in a pantomime, when the stage, suddenly illuminated, discovers the Temple of the Fairy Queen, or the abode of some beneficent genius in the "Realms of Bliss." The last scene! Ah! if it were the last! Alack, and well-a-day! human life is not a pantomime in which, after a good deal of hard knocking about, we have the power to wind up in a blaze of rosy light, making our exit pirouetting on a cloud. Mrs. Rawlings, however, never troubled herself about such considerations; and as she stepped her costly chambers in 'Indian silks that filled the air with rustling music, and sunned herself in the surrounding mirrors, she might be excused if she gave way at first to a little womanly exultation. Her pulses fluttered wildly in her new cage, and for a time she was lost in wonder and admiration. But it is astonishing how soon we become reconciled to prosperity, and how readily we fall into the ways of the great world, however indifferently nature or education may have fitted us to grace or enjoy them. The fashionable homage that was paid to Mrs. Rawlings gave her a *prestige* in society which, whatever might have been the esti-

mate put upon it by the circles that pressed round her, was prized by the lady herself as the guarantee of a position as real and solid as if she had been born to the honours which venality and sordid flattery persisted in heaping upon her.

There was not an hour in the day unoccupied. Visits, exhibitions, public meetings, *soirées*, and dinners filled up the round of her laborious existence. She was whirled into these busy scenes she hardly knew how, and they succeeded each other so quickly, and her engagements were so numerous and urgent, that, even had she been conscious how indifferently her previous habits had prepared her for the discharge of such brilliant functions, she really never had leisure to reflect upon the matter. The worst of it was, that she was always in a flurry, and expended a great deal more animal spirits than her occasions required. She had not yet learned the economy of repose; and it was prophesied by her new acquaintances that she would break up at the end of her first season. She did not break up for all that; but rather seemed to rebound from her exertions with increased elasticity. She had found at last the kind of life—light, sprightly, and transitory—which exactly agreed with her desires and her constitution.

Clara attracted universal admiration. Her beauty and vivacity would have drawn the eyes of the crowd upon her under any circumstances; but the reputation of a large fortune rendered her the object of closer and more eager attentions. The number of lounging cadets who followed her wherever she went, was quite oppressive, and if she had not had a natural genius for variety, her gay life must have run a grave risk of being nipped in the bud. The art with which she baffled their addresses was derived direct from nature, which, in lieu of the sense that enables men (when they happen to be endowed with it) to select and secure their advantages, supplies women with a tact or instinct that often answers the purpose better. Sense sometimes makes a mistake in its calculations; tact seldom errs. Sense may know best what to do; but tact knows best when and how to do it; and in these matters of social experience everything depends on promptitude at the right moment. While sense is watching its opportunity, tact strikes.

Running the gauntlet of a mob of admirers, Clara escaped without a wound. Sometimes, in a pensive moment, on her return from a ball, or a dinner, or a long dull *séance* of political and literary people, with

troops of images flitting through her brain, she might have fancied that some one had made an impression upon her, and gone to sleep in a state of palpitating confusion. But when she awoke in the morning she was calm and clear. There was not a tinge of romantic sentiment in her nature. She took pleasure as it came on the surface, and accepted it only at its fugitive value. It never occurred to her to make a phantasy of love to herself by imagining a feeling that had not reached her heart. She wisely waited for the reality.

The bustle and incessant motion were more fatiguing than agreeable to Margaret. In the midst of the glitter, she always suggested the notion of a person whose thoughts were elsewhere, and who was longing for solitude and green fields. Her soul looked out of her eyes yearningly for a sympathy which she could nowhere find in hot and crowded rooms; and the chief amusement she seemed to extract from the thronged panorama was to watch and speculate upon its shifting phases. But she was rarely suffered to indulge her inclinations in this way. The more she retreated from indiscriminate flattery, the more she was followed. Like her sister, she had her circle of slaves, but it was

less numerous and rather more select, for the approaches were not so broad and open, nor the deity within so liberal of her fascinations.

Amongst the multitude who were most assiduous in their visits at Park-lane, was a lady who made some show in the fashionable world, although her pretensions were considered a little ambiguous. The history of the Baroness de Poudre-bleu furnished an episode in the small talk of the coteries that never failed to elicit detractive witticisms. But as we see no reason why we should make a mystery about a handsome woman of a certain age, who was quite as good as her neighbours, we will relate all the facts we have been able to collect concerning her antecedents.

The baroness was not a foreigner, as her title seemed to imply, but true English flesh and blood. Had she been of a mythological descent, there could not have been more contradictory accounts of her origin than were circulated by her intimate friends. They agreed only on one fact, that in her youth she was distinguished by a commanding figure and a lofty cast of beauty, and that from the outset she manifested a corresponding scorn for people of her own rank (whatever it was), and a profound admira-

tion of the ranks above her. Opportunity, which makes heroes of men, and, sometimes, martyrs of women, favoured her ambition.

The Honourable Colonel Bulkeley Smirke was heir presumptive to the title of his brother, Lord Huxley. His lordship's constitution was broken up—the colonel was lusty, active, and ten years younger: and there being cogent reasons, it was said, why his lordship would not, or could not, marry, the colonel's accession to the peerage was looked upon as a certainty. The young beauty took these circumstances into consideration. The colonel was a high-bred man, with a loose and dangerous reputation; and if she had been influenced by views of a domestic nature—such as sitting down with a husband in a home consecrated to the household gods—he was the last man in the world she would have chosen. But it was not the colonel she wanted to marry, nor household gods she yearned for; she wanted to marry the Huxley title by proxy, and she yearned only for a fashionable career.

A beautiful woman with a strong will can do anything she likes. The colonel, in his own opinion, had exhausted the sex, and was proof against their

arts. But, like thousands of experienced gentlemen, he was brought down by a dart feathered from his own plumage. He relied upon his knowledge of women—so did the lady. He believed that his knowledge was complete at all points—she knew that it was shallow and delusive, and she played upon it like a sharper who loses a few tricks in the beginning to lure on his antagonist. At first she tantalised him with fits of indifference that piqued his vanity. Then she awakened his jealousy. The strategy was so perfect that he took to himself the whole merit of an imaginary conquest over her heart. He carried her off triumphantly, as he believed, from a host of baffled rivals, but not till he had secured her a little pin-money to the tune of seven or eight hundred a year.

Her subsequent introduction to the London circles as the Honourable Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke was highly satisfactory. Whatever the ladies may have thought of her, the gentlemen at least acknowledged the supremacy of her charms and the finished graces of her manner. Circumstances shaped themselves felicitously to the mode of life she panted for. After a few weeks of dalliance the colonel took to his clubs and his horses again, and left his wife to the



free indulgence of her own desires in an elegant *bijou* of a house, where she entertained whom, how, and when she pleased.

This delicious existence lasted through two seasons. Then came a sudden break-up, which fell upon her without a moment's warning. One night, coming home from a brilliant party, she found a note from the colonel on her toilette-table. It conveyed in a few hurried words the astounding intelligence that her husband had that night started for the Continent—that his affairs were deeply involved—that he had left instructions to sell off the house and furniture without an hour's delay—and that she was to collect whatever she could out of the wreck, and follow him to Paris. Upon reading this brief scrawl, evidently written in a state of frightful agitation, Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke uttered a low cry, but remembering that her maid was in the room, she crushed up the note in her hand, and, with inimitable composure, proceeded to disrobe.

Her brain was full of expedients. Her self-possession never forsook her. She saw the gulf before her, although she could not measure its sightless depth, and she made up her mind at once. Dismissing her maid for the night, she devoted the

whole of the miserable hours till daybreak in collecting her jewels, and all the portable articles of value she could carry off without observation. It was her last night in England. Her scheme of life was blasted. Nothing remained of all that flaunting luxury, but the glittering fragments. Yet she did not despair. Early the next morning, after converting into money everything that was available, she despatched a few gay notes announcing that she was going on a tour, which she described as quite an impromptu affair. By this bright little artifice she hoped to cover her retreat, and, at all events, secure the first version of her disgrace. That night she set her face towards Dover, and in two days she joined her husband in Paris.

Matters were worse than she had anticipated. The colonel, devoured by a passion for dice, and relying confidently upon the Huxley estates in prospect, had sold himself and all his hopes to the Jews. This was nothing; for the Jews would have waited patiently enough if a circumstance had not happened that filled them with dismay. It transpired, all of a sudden, that Lord Huxley had taken it into his head to marry. Then the storm burst. It was all over with the colonel. Judgment-debts, warrants, and

personal securities leaped out of the desks of usurers and attorneys, and the colonel fled.

All that was left to the honourable Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke was the beggarly pin-money. One faint ray of hope, however, fell on her in the midst of the desolation. She had a son—the only issue of that happy union—called after his father, and inheriting the beauty of his mother. As yet he was the heir presumptive; and as there was no great likelihood of any obstacle to his succession arising from the marriage of a shattered old lord, Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke lived on in that hope, and dedicated herself, with unremitting maternal solicitude, to the care of her boy.

A residence in Paris was out of the question. It would have brought them under the scrutiny of too many old acquaintances, so they adjourned to the German baths, and, moving about from place to place, made the best of their stinted resources. The colonel became an *habitué* of the rouge-et-noir tables, and the lady managed to keep up her spirits, and gather a circle of admirers about her wherever she went. It was whispered that she turned her fascinations to a profitable account, and played herself occasionally with rich “fellows,” who were not

unwilling to lose money to her. But we give no credit to such scandals.

After economising for a whole month in the cheap valleys of Switzerland—a period of dismal quarantine to the colonel—they made their way into Italy, and settled at Florence. The climax of Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke's misfortunes was now approaching. One morning they received a letter from England, accompanied by a newspaper. The conjunction was ominous. Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke opened the paper first, and, with a presentiment of calamity, flew at once to the "Births." There she discovered the terrible fact, confirmed by the letter, that Lady Huxley had presented her husband with a son. Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke at that time wore her dark hair in long tresses that swept her fine shoulders in a bewildering fall. No woman better understood the enchantments of premeditated disorder in the disposition of her silken meshes; and she was so consummate a mistress of effect, that even when she was plunged in the deepest trouble, she could not resist the temptation it threw out in the way of expression. Here was a fine stage "situation" for our accomplished actress; and she never looked more captivating than when she flung back her hair with a wild toss

of her head, leaving a few tresses wandering over her bosom, and looked at her husband with a frantic smile. It was difficult to believe that the vermilion dew which lay upon her parted lips sprang from real agony; but the agony was real, nevertheless.

The worst was now known. The boy Bulkeley was doomed to be plain Bulkeley for the rest of his days; and as the colonel could never re-appear in England, the only prospect that lay before them was permanent banishment, relieved by affectionate messages from home in the shape of outlawries. Loosened from all responsibility to society, and mingling with a floating population of fashionable outcasts like himself, the colonel sought oblivion, where only such men can find it, in a life of dissipation and profligacy. The sequel may be soon told. Excesses of all kinds did their work upon him, and he sank under them at last. At the end of a few years, the Hon. Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke was a widow.

It is astonishing what wear and tear and mental tortures women of the world pass through and conceal in their time, surviving in the full bloom of their spirits, and looking as angelical as if they had led the lives of Sybarites, instead of having been dragged to pieces by private horrors. No bird of Paradise

could have been more radiant than Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke when the short period of mourning was over. She breathed a freer atmosphere than ever. If she was not quite so young as when she had left London, her beauty was more developed and her knowledge of life more matured. But she shrank from the humiliation of coming back a nominal Smirke, disowned, as she was sure to be, by the head of that noble family. Revolving this point of personal dignity over and over again in her mind, she hit upon the ingenious idea of sinking Smirke altogether, and taking up a foreign title, which would enable her to cast a veil over the past, and to re-enter the world with *éclat*. During these years of struggle and wandering, she had, by means best known to herself, contrived to save a little money; and as the Duke of Tuscany was always in want of funds for a new road, or an old charity, or something else, and was always glad to get a respectable offer for a patent of nobility, there was no difficulty in bringing this desirable matter to bear. The bargain was struck accordingly, the patent made out, and one elastic-spring morning Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke made her second *avatar* in Mayfair, under the style and title of the Baroness de Poudre-bleu.

Her income, it must be confessed, was painfully small; but expending nearly the whole of it upon appearances, and living upon little or nothing, the mystery was not so wonderful as some people pretended to think. Out of seven or eight hundred a year, it is just possible to job a small carriage, to rent a small house, and to keep a couple of livery servants on board wages, if the proprietor of this surface splendour be content to feed upon air. The Baroness de Poudre-bleu went out into a great deal of high company; but that cost her nothing. She was not expected to give dinner parties, and a supperless *soirée* or two in the season discharged all her obligations to the wide circle in which she moved. Her chief luxuries and heaviest expenditure were a charming little residence and a tiny carriage; but she knew the exact extent of these charges, and met them by a strict, pinching economy in everything else. Costume was a terrible item, for she dressed magnificently; but then her own maid was a French milliner, who helped her to the fashions at half-price; so that, one way and another, she made a handsome show, like the butterflies, with very little substance beneath.

Being unable, however, to produce much effect

by the costliness of her appointments, she had recourse to a cheaper and more startling mode of notoriety. She published a novel. It was called "Agatha; or, The Bride of the Barricades: a Story of the Revolution." Revolutions were fashionable at that time, and the book had an extensive circulation amongst the author's acquaintances, to each of whom she sent a copy with her autograph. The distinction she obtained by this work amongst crowds of people who never read a line of it, was flattering to her ambition. Everybody assured her that Agatha was *the* book of the season; and her friend, Mr. Trainer, who was a regular author, and was supposed to hold some misty relations with the newspaper press, declared that, in his time, no book had been so unanimously praised by the reviewers.

This literary exploit gave a decided piquancy to her social reputation. She was somebody, over and above being still a fine woman and a person of fashion. In her conversation she rather eschewed literature, and talked of the book as a whim thrown off to please her fancy, and not as writers, to whom authorship is a work of love or labour, usually talk of their productions. In fact, whenever she did speak of literature, it was with the modesty and reserve of one



who possessed great powers in that way, and had the good taste not to crush other people by the display of them. Whenever there were authors of any note present, she made it a point to avoid them. A little literary fame was all very well as a graceful adjunct to fashionable celebrity; but she would not suffer it on any account to be supposed that it was the special distinction she coveted.

Master Poudre-bleu—we beg pardon, Mr. Bulkeley Smirke—was now about one or two and twenty years of age. This young gentleman having been educated abroad, had foreign manners, if we may so describe his languid and elegant style; spoke English with a lisping, exotic accent; and being very pale and handsome, like his mother, was rather *distingué* in appearance. The course of education from which he had just graduated gave him a signal advantage over his English contemporaries. He had seen more of the seamy side of society than any of them, and had already arrived at certain conclusions concerning human life, which rendered it exceedingly improbable that he should ever fall a sacrifice to his sensibilities. He had seen, indeed, so much which it might have been as well he had not seen—that his juvenile faith in virtue of all kinds was fairly ex-

tinguished. In his own small, indolent way he was a sort of social atheist, and his conversation was coloured throughout by that general unbelief which sets up the kind of pretty paradoxes which young ladies, who are not embarrassed by ideas, love to argue about. He had the aspect of a youth who had worn out his enthusiasm, if he ever had any, and was considered an interesting specimen of the genus *blasé*.

The grand object of his mother's life was to quarter this young gentleman upon some rich family. He had nothing to look forward to but a wife with money. This was the only thing in the world he was fit for. His education had taken no determinate direction. He had no practical acquisitions of any earthly description. He did not know how to do anything; and his white hands were as useless as his unbelieving head. No human being could be better qualified for the destiny his mother marked out for him.

When the Baroness de Poudre-bleu made the acquaintance of the Rawlingses at the house of her friend Lady Twisleton, the wife of the wealthy loan-contractor, she saw in half an eye that they were the very stock set apart by nature for her maternal

design. They possessed all the characteristics of people who come into the great world predestined to be victimised; they were ignorant of its ways and wiles, easily won by attentions, and inordinately rich. The baroness, therefore, sat down to a regular siege of the Rawlingses. She charmed Mrs. Rawlings with her affability and good nature; and showered such constant and affectionate kindnesses upon the girls that the grateful little souls fell quite in love with her. Indeed the ladies became at last absolutely inseparable. The baroness was regarded by them all as the most gracious and unaffectedly charming woman in the world.

In the confidence she thus won, and the ascendancy she thus secured, the baroness laid the roots of a matrimonial tree which was to bear golden fruit for her darling Bulkeley. She studied the characters of the two girls with diligence and penetration before she made up her mind which of them she should select as the future wife of her son, and after long and grave consideration, her choice fell upon Margaret.

## CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH THE READER IS INVITED TO A BALL IN PARK LANE.

MR. RAWLINGS' first session passed off triumphantly. He carried his bill for the railroad, and appointed Mr. John Peabody secretary. Nor, in the flood-tide of prosperity, did he forget his friend Captain Scott Dingle, to whom he allotted one hundred and fifty shares; advising him, at the same time, not to lose a moment in coming up to London, as he had other objects in view for him. Dingle knew nothing about business, and never having had an opportunity of enjoying the luxury of a little superfluous cash, was in the habit of looking upon riches as an allegory. If ever, at any period of his life, he had indulged in the thought that it was possible he might, by some extraordinary chance, come into a trifle of money, over and above his actual necessities, it was only as men dream over

the fire in their wintry solitude, building castles in the air, and blowing them away again. These delusions had long since vanished. Many years had elapsed since he had been troubled with such visions, and he was now too old to raise any airy structures in the future. The door of hope, which had never been very hospitable to him, was closed, and barred, and bolted in his face. It never even occurred to him to knock at it, for he was quite sure it wouldn't be opened.

When, therefore, he received an unexpected summons from Mr. Rawlings, accompanied by a letter of allotment, which, at that moment, was actually worth several hundred pounds, he could hardly trust to the evidence of his senses. But the document admitted of no doubt; and Rawlings was not the sort of man to volunteer a piece of advice, without having sound reasons for it. He did not understand it himself in the least; but his confidence in Rawlings was unlimited; and, without stopping to reflect upon his good fortune, and, if the truth must be confessed, hardly believing in it, he hastened up to London.

He was received in Park-lane with cordiality; but Rawlings was so much occupied that the first interview did not last ten minutes. Enough trans-

pired, however, to awaken a delirious sensation of delight in the captain's mind, who, lifted out of a state of total stagnation, found himself all at once pitched into a whirl of prosperous activity. As he had formerly felt a secret conviction that if it were to rain bank-notes not one of them would drop upon his path; so, in his present ecstasy, he believed that should such a shower fall, the wind would blow every particle of it straight into his pockets. Rawlings, it appeared, had not only secured him the shares, but had put down his name on the committee; and Dingle had scarcely been a fortnight in London, when he had the intense satisfaction of figuring in a similar capacity in half-a-dozen lines. Many people asked who Captain Scott Dingle was; but it was a sufficient answer to all inquiries that he was a friend of the member for Yarlton. Dingle's fortune was made. He could see no end to the riches that were minting for him by the benevolent genii in Moorgate-street, who were about this time beginning to cluster on a spot destined to become famous in the annals of Bubble-dom. Money, hitherto a myth, was now a reality to the captain. The long-suppressed aspirations of the gentleman had vent at last. The style of the

outer man underwent a visible and important change. His moustachios were carefully oiled; he mounted a handsome open blue waistcoat with military buttons, and just such coats, pantaloons, and boots, as became a dashing military man of a certain age. He looked almost handsome, and certainly very airy and gallant, as he stepped of a morning out of Feuillade's Hotel in the Opera Colonnade, and glanced up and down the street with a roguish sparkle in his eyes, as if he had come out to make conquests of all the women. It was a sight worth going a long way to see, he looked so happy and assured, as he stood pulling on his kid gloves in the most leisurely manner, and swinging his faithful bamboo, like one who had nothing in the world to think about but pleasure. Ah! that was a delicious episode in the life of Captain Scott Dingle.

There was a crowded assembly at Park-lane, in the house of Richard Rawlings, Esq., M.P. The report of the entertainment which appeared the next day in the *Morning Post*, displayed a galaxy of great names, including Lord Fiddlesby who had just returned from an embassy at St. Petersburg, and was the diplomatic lion of the hour; Lord Charles Eton, a young politician of great promise,

who had been selected this session to second the address in the House of Commons; Sir Peter Jinks, the bank director; the Countess of Rakely, the Ladies Amelia and Clemence Rosherville, and a crowd of other people of mark and distinction.

All the rooms were thrown open, and the crush was so great in the apartment devoted to quadrilles and waltzes, that the dancers were shut up in little rings, with hardly space enough to poise themselves to the time of the music. The pursuit of dancing under difficulties is a lugubrious and equivocal pleasure, and to judge from the solemn faces of the young people who dedicate themselves to this amusement, a looker-on, who happened to be ignorant of the gravity that lies at the bottom of our enjoyments, might suppose that they were performing some kind of painful sacrificial rite.

In the course of the evening the Baroness de Poudre-blue managed to engage Margaret to her son for a waltz and a quadrille. The waltz was just over, and Mr. Bulkeley Smirke conducted his partner to a seat close to his mother. As a matter of course, the conversation ran upon the heat of the room. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke thought it stifling. He had by no means made up his mind on the general



question of dancing. What possible pleasure could there be in making oneself so intolerably hot? Would Miss Rawlings take an ice?

Margaret declined.

"Did you ever see such an *insouciant* wretch in your life?" observed the baroness; "he dances with such provoking composure and *sang froid*. Now what do you say to him, Margaret?"

"Say?" replied Margaret, "that a dancer cannot be too quiet."

"One doesn't set about a dance," observed Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, "as if it were a gymnastic exercise. The art is to get through the figure with as little trouble as possible. You have all the world here to-night, Miss Rawlings. Who is that man talking to your father?"

Margaret looked in the direction indicated. The gentleman with whom her father was engaged in conversation was of the middle size, young, with a severe and thoughtful expression of face, large dark eyes, and a slight stoop in the shoulders. She did not know him; and in the next minute they had both moved away. The baroness thought it a good opportunity to get up a little flirtation between Bulkeley and Margaret.

"Who is she like?" said the baroness, with a bewitching smile, taking up Margaret's small white hand, and looking lovingly in her face. "Now, think, Bulkeley. Do you remember anybody she resembles?" Margaret felt herself glowing over with blushes; and if she resembled anybody at that moment it must have been somebody with very crimson cheeks.

"Like?" returned Bulkeley, "you don't mean Mademoiselle Fenestre?"

"My dear, how could you commit such a blunder. You recollect the Princess Luigi? Now, look at her eyes,—do you detect the likeness?"

"Well, there is something in the expression," replied Bulkeley.

"Only, my love, you are so much younger and fairer, I declare, at a little distance, I might have almost mistaken you for her."

"Am I so like her?" said Margaret. "Who was she?"

"Oh! the Princess Luigi," said the baroness; "she was the niece of the Cardinal Ambroccini, and connected with some high families in Tuscany, where I met her. She was perfectly lovely, and, do you know, she took such a fancy to Bulkeley, that

she quite spoiled him. Young as he was, I was afraid he would leave his heart behind him. And then you are so like her!"

This was pretty broad. Margaret felt her ears tingling, although she did not interpret the compliment exactly in the way it was meant. She was confused at being thought so very like the beautiful Princess Luigi; but it never occurred to her that the baroness intended to carry the analogy any farther. As for Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, he bore the infliction of an allusion to his heart with imperturbable coolness. Understanding clearly the drift of his mother, whose diplomatic talents he held in the greatest respect, he contented himself with an indolent stare at Margaret, waiting to hear what she would say. He was one of those young gentlemen who treat very young ladies with a patronising air, and loll on cushions expecting to be wooed. The only women he considered it worth his while to take any trouble about were women much older than himself. At twenty-one he looked upon unmarried ladies of his own age as mere dolls, to whom he talked with a condescending simper that showed at once indifference and superiority. In short, Mr. Bulkeley Smirke despised girls, and affected the society of

married women, who alone possessed the power of exciting his attention.

But he was wide awake, nevertheless, to the importance of a *mariage de convenance*. He had been carefully educated up to that point, and every symptom of taste, feeling, or inclination that might interfere with it was sedulously subdued. Never was twig more vigilantly bent, and never did tree grow more obediently to the hand that trained it. Notwithstanding that apathy of manner which was habitual to him, he had made up his mind about Margaret Rawlings. The only difference that arose between him and his mother, in their private conferences on the subject, referred to the mode of proceeding. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was confident of success, without thinking much pains necessary to secure it; while the baroness, who had studied the whole family industriously, saw difficulties in the way which demanded the nicest management and discretion.

Margaret had not the slightest suspicion of the net that was weaving round her; and when Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, following up the delicate flattery of his mother, begged of her not to believe that his heart had ever been touched by the Princess Luigi, she took him at his word with a simple quietness that

confounded him. He expected the innuendo would be caught up, and was prepared for a counter-play of bantering which might lead him indirectly to his object. But Margaret had no relish for idle foppery about hearts; and, of all persons, thought that Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was the very last who ought to be permitted to trifle on such subjects. There was a serious enthusiasm in her nature which might have been easily awakened; but not by Mr. Bulkeley Smirke.

"I suppose, Miss Rawlings," lisped the young gentleman, "you think I have no heart."

"Indeed," returned Margaret, "I never thought about it."

"Really, that's very severe of you."

"Severe?"

"The fact is, I didn't believe in such a thing myself, until"—and he stopped short, twirling his glove with one hand, and adjusting his collar with the other.

"That's rather an ominous pause, my dear," exclaimed the baroness; "you are bound to finish the sentence, or Miss Rawlings will fancy you're a universal lover."

"Well, I was going to say something that would

prove to Miss Rawlings that I am the most devoted fellow in the world."

"I beg," said Margaret, "you will not take the trouble to prove anything of the kind. The baroness is only jesting. See, they're getting up another quadrille."

"I shall not dance the next quadrille," said Bulkeley.

"You're shockingly cruel upon poor Bulkeley," observed the baroness; "you really ought to let him explain himself."

"Exactly," said Bulkeley, looking with a vacant expression at Margaret, "exactly; only let me explain myself."

"But there's nothing to explain," returned Margaret.

"Come, you sha'n't escape me in that way," replied Bulkeley Smirke, pinching the tips of a *bouquet* which Margaret held in her hand; "I shall be quite *au désespoir* if you don't listen to me."

At this moment Mr. Rawlings came up, accompanied by the gentleman with whom he had been recently engaged in conversation. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke withdrew his hand from the *bouquet*, and looked in another direction.

"Lord Charles Eton, my dear," said Mr. Rawlings, "has requested me to introduce him to you for the next quadrille. My daughter, Miss Margaret Rawlings."

Lord Charles made a slight, but graceful inclination of his head, and offered his arm to Margaret. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke looked as black as thunder, and was on the point of saying that the lady was engaged to him—for the petted boy had a right royal temper,—when his mother put her hand on his arm, and whispered, "Don't be a fool, Bulkeley. You said you would not dance the next quadrille." By the time this action was over, Lord Charles Eton and Margaret Rawlings were swept into one of the little rings in the centre of the room.

Margaret was conscious of a slight trepidation as she rose to take her partner's arm. The gravity and earnestness of his manner, with the full light of his clear dark eyes falling upon her, had something to do with it; but that was not all. She had often heard of Lord Charles Eton, but had fancied him a different sort of man. He had gained first-class honours at Oxford, where Henry Winston, who was his junior by several years, had formed his ac-

quaintance, and been so captivated by his talents, that, with characteristic ardour, he prophesied a distinguished career for the incipient senator. Lord Charles had been trained from the beginning for public life, had already won a high reputation for eloquence, and added to his severer acquirements the graces of liberal scholarship. His refined and fastidious taste was displayed in a volume of lyrical poems, which he published before he left college; and his literary ambition had subsequently taken a loftier flight in an historical work, which was less remarkable for brilliancy of treatment, than for perspicuity and research. The impression he made upon his contemporaries was that of a man of sound judgment, comprehensive powers, and inflexible integrity. Margaret was a little timid at first, but the suavity and gentleness of his manner very soon put her at her ease; and she was not slow to discover that the rising statesman of the day could be as agreeable in the ball-room as he was influential in the senate.

While they are engaged in the quadrille, we will take a turn in one of the adjoining apartments. Here we recognise some old acquaintances. Captain Scott Dingle is lounging over the back of a



chair, chatting negligently with Mrs. Rawlings. The last few years have wrought an alteration in him; but he dresses up wonderfully for candle-light. His hair is thinner than it used to be, and nearly grey; but his moustachios still keep their dark hue, and, by the force of contrast, look more fierce than ever.

"Magnificent, 'pon my life!" whispered the captain; "everything in such capital taste. Does you a world of credit, Mrs. Rawlings."

"Oh! don't give me any credit, my dear captain," said Mrs. Rawlings; "you don't suppose I attend to these things? Bless you, it's all Gunter," she added, laughing, in a low whisper, extending a broad gilt fan between her face and the company. "That's the way we manage in London. Just throw your eye over the waiters when you go down to supper. As I say to Rawlings, money will do anything in London."

"I hope I have the honour of seeing Mrs. Rawlings quite well?" said a sleek-looking gentleman, with a round hat under his arm, addressing Mrs. Rawlings.

"Ah! how do ye do—how do ye do, Mr. Trumbull?" returned Mrs. Rawlings; "you're a sad man

to come so late. Why are you not dancing? I thought all you American gentlemen were fond of dancing."

"That's rather hard upon my country, ma'am," replied Mr. Trumbull; "certainly there are some people in America who do dance, for it's a vast surface of earth, that eternal continent of ours, and reckons an uncommon population of heterogeneous souls; but the people of the United States, Mrs. Rawlings, are too busy with their heads to have much time for their heels—that's a fact. Captain Dingle! Glad to meet you again, sir; never saw you since that remarkable demonstration of democratic sentiment at Yarlton. I should esteem it a great privilege to be present the next time you set up for Parliament."

"Very obliging in you, Mr. Trumbull," returned the captain, looking a little angry; "but I haven't the slightest intention of gratifying your curiosity."

"Well," replied Mr. Trumbull, "there's some sense in that. I read your address, captain, and look upon you to be a regular go-ahead Republican, and no mistake; but your politics won't go down at Yarlton—that's my candid opinion."

Captain Scott Dingle was awfully outraged at

this allusion to his politics. If ever there was a man who cordially hated politics it was Captain Scott Dingle. He had hoped that that unfortunate incident in his life, in which he had suffered himself to be put forward as a victim to oblige his friend was, by this time, buried in oblivion; but here was a man, rising up like an avenging spirit, to remind him of it at a moment when he was in the full feather of enjoyment; and he felt as if he were doomed to be dogged all his life by that one criminal fact. A Republican! His blood leaped into his ears, and he could have chastised Trumbull on the spot. To make the matter worse, there was a cynical-looking man standing close to them, and listening to the conversation with, as Dingle thought, a supercilious leer on his face. Dingle resolved that that man, whoever he was, should not go away with the notion that he was a Republican.

"Sir," said Dingle, looking Trumbull straight in the face, "I repudiate. You understand that word, I believe, at the other side of the water—*repudiate*. You've made an egregious mistake in calling me a Republican; and, more than that, I don't think you'll find such an animal in all England."

The captain drew up like a conqueror; the cyni-

cal-looking man smiled; and Mr. Trumbull opened his mouth wide with a gasp of astonishment.

"You're a real lightning-conductor, captain—you are!" returned Trumbull.

"I may be a lightning-conductor," replied the captain, "but I'm not a Republican."

Trumbull was going to say something, but the captain turned his head away, plainly indicating that he was determined to have nothing more to do with him.

"Ah! Sir Peter," cried Mrs. Rawlings; "glad to see you. I have been looking for Lady Jinks everywhere. What have you done with her?"

"Left her," replied the cynical-looking man, "in a profound discussion with Mr. Trainer on the Baroness de Poudre-bleu's wonderful novel." Then, stooping his head, he inquired, in a whisper, "Who is that gentleman in the moustachios?"

"Oh! don't you know him?" returned Mrs. Rawlings, "the best creature in the world—Captain Scott Dingle. Shall I introduce you?"

"What is he celebrated for?" inquired Sir Peter Jinks.

"Well, I don't think he's celebrated for any-

thing," replied Mrs. Rawlings, laughing, "unless it is his good-nature." Whereupon Sir Peter joined Mrs. Rawlings in a short grim laugh.

"He stood for Yarlton, I believe?"

"Oh! don't you know all about that?" said Mrs. Rawlings; "sit down here beside me, and I'll tell you."

Sir Peter quietly dropped into a chair, and, with his eyes bent upon the ground, listened to the whole history of the election, related with many inaccuracies, and in a humour of good-natured exaggeration that placed poor Dingle's share of the transaction in the most ludicrous light, and by no means contributed to elevate Mr. Rawlings in the estimation of the bank director.

"He is such a good creature, that Dingle," said Mrs. Rawlings; "we've known him, I don't know how many years—long before we ever dreamt of a house in Park-lane. Mr. Rawlings does not forget his old friends, Sir Peter, as you'd say, if you knew all he has done for poor Dingle."

"No doubt, no doubt," returned Sir Peter; "I dare say he has done a great deal for him."

"Everything; put him on the committee of his

own line, and gave him I don't know what in shares. It was a lucky day for him, Sir Peter, when Mr. Rawlings took him up."

"Gave him shares?" repeated Sir Peter; "a fortunate man to have such a friend as Mr. Rawlings."

"There," said Mrs. Rawlings, "look how confidential they are together. I declare it's quite pleasant to see that good-natured captain in such spirits. And to think that he set up against my husband—ha! ha!"

Sir Peter raised his head, and saw Mr. Rawlings in close conversation with the captain, who seemed to be listening attentively to him. In a few minutes Mr. Rawlings drew Dingle away through the crowd, Sir Peter following them with his sinister eyes till they disappeared.

Making their way through detached groups down the stairs, including sundry batches of flirting lovers and heated dancers, who had come out to cool themselves, Mr. Rawlings and the captain passed into a small library on the ground floor. A person buttoned up in a dusty mackintosh, as if he had just come off a journey, rose from a table at their entrance. It was John Peabody, looking very drudged and jaded. The captain shook hands with

him good-naturedly, but, perhaps, in rather a florid manner. It was evident that Peabody had all the hard work of the line upon his shoulders, with as strong a natural taste for idleness as the captain himself, while the captain was enjoying the honey. The distance between the committee-man and the secretary was obvious the moment they sat down, although, it is only justice to say, that the captain wore his honours with as much gentlemanly friendliness as was consistent with their relative positions.

"Where is the bank-book?" said Rawlings.

Peabody placed it before him.

"We have a special meeting of the committee to-morrow," said Rawlings, addressing Dingle, "and as it is necessary to have some of our work ready before we meet, I want you to sign these cheques. The signature of two members of the committee and the secretary is all the authority we require. Here they are. It will save you the trouble of attending."

"All right, I suppose?" said Dingle.

"Right?" repeated Rawlings; "Dingle, unfortunately you're not a man of business, or you'd never put so absurd a question. We want the cheques to pay for purchases I have made on account of the

company, for which receipts must be laid before the committee in the morning. If we were to wait for committees to do these things, we should never get through our work."

"True enough," returned Dingle; "they do nothing but walk in and walk out again, pocket their guinea, and throw all the labour upon you. Afraid, Rawlings, I must plead guilty myself—but hang me if ever I was cut out for business. I can sign my name, however, thanks to some venerable school-master, whom I can never be sufficiently grateful to, for that's about the extent of my qualifications. *Ecce signum!* we must vote a piece of plate to you by and by for doing our business for us."

"That will do," said Mr. Rawlings, folding up the cheques, and handing them to Peabody; "and now we will release you. I have other business with Peabody."

The captain was rejoiced to be liberated, and sauntered back up the stairs, humming a light air, and pleasantly impressed with the advantages of a position which attached so much importance to his signature. Reflections of a similar nature were, probably, passing at the same moment through the mind of Mr. Rawlings.



Dingle lounged into the ball-room, and, taking up his station in a corner, with his back negligently placed against the wall, began to survey the company through a gold eye-glass, with which he had recently indulged himself, and which hung suspended over his white waistcoat, on a small and almost imperceptible black cord. He scarcely knew half-a-dozen people in the whole of that assembly; but he looked as much at home as if he knew them all. No man was ever more completely in his element.

The music of a waltz was dying out, and the dancers were dropping away to the sides. The universal Clara was surrounded by a group of gentlemen who were trying to get up a promenade against a tide of people, and Margaret retreated into a recess at the end of the room. Her partner, a bashful and awkward young man, stood hovering over her, without uttering a word. The situation was rather embarrassing to the young lady; but she was speedily relieved from it by the appearance of Lord Charles Eton, who came up and spoke to her. The awkward young man took the earliest opportunity of vanishing into the crowd.

Presently there was a seat vacant near her, and Lord Charles glided into it. The low and quiet

tone of his voice, the subjects he talked about, and his unaffected good-breeding, interested her. She felt herself in the presence of a superior mind, and was flattered by the consideration with which he treated her. He seemed to be as familiar with art and literature, as if such topics alone had occupied his studies; and she felt so much pleasure in listening to one who had charmed the senate with his eloquence that she spoke little herself. The feeling he inspired was that of admiration of his talents. This kind of experience was new to her; it awakened her intellect, and absorbed her attention.

She was too much engrossed to notice the movements around her. If she had, she might have seen the baroness at a little distance observing her attentively, and now and then, through the groups that passed and re-passed, she might have caught the anxious eyes of her father. There came a little pause in that agreeable conversation, and looking up, almost unconsciously, she saw, for the first time, a gentleman standing in the shadow of the draperies of the window quite close to her, gazing upon her with a fixed and earnest expression of countenance.

She quickly withdrew her eyes, she hardly knew why. But, curious, nevertheless, to know who it

was, she ventured, a few minutes afterwards, to look at him again. Their eyes met, and this time she did not take them away. She thought she remembered the face. There was an alteration, but the well-known features—especially the eyes, which are the last to suffer change—could not be mistaken. She instantly rose from her chair, and put out her hand.

“Henry Winston!” she exclaimed.

Henry Winston it was, with a very serious aspect, and not quite so handsome as when he used to wear his dark hair clustering in rich curls over his neck, but retaining enough of his boyish beauty to testify beyond doubt to his identity.

“Miss Rawlings,” replied Henry, taking the extended hand, “I was afraid you had forgotten me.”

“Miss Rawlings!” echoed Margaret, in a smothered voice; then checking herself, she added, “I did not know you were in town. When did you arrive? and why did you not come to see us?”

“I arrived only yesterday,” returned Henry; “and I came here to-night with Lord Charles. Didn’t he tell you I was here?” directing the question partly to Lord Charles.

“I must plead guilty,” said Lord Charles, “to a very inexcusable omission. But my friend Winston

will forgive me; for he used to talk to me at college so much about you, Miss Rawlings, that he cannot be surprised I should forget him in your society." This was said with a pleasantry so graceful and good-natured, that Henry Winston, although evidently mortified, accepted the apology with a forced smile.

"Are you come to make any stay in London," inquired Margaret.

"I hardly know," replied Henry; "but I am happy to say I have done with college. I don't happen to be so devoted to learning as my friend Lord Charles."

"I beg of you not to believe that modest speech, Miss Rawlings," said Lord Charles; "I assure you he took his degree with infinite credit."

"Have you seen mamma and Clara?" inquired Margaret.

"Oh! yes, I have had a long gossip with them both."

"And never came to speak to me?"

"You have been so engrossed," returned Henry in an under tone, "that I could not find an opportunity. Great changes have happened since I saw you."

"You do not find us changed to our old friends, I hope?" said Margaret.

"Clara," said Henry, "is just the same as ever—not an atom changed."

"Well, and Margaret? Do you think I am changed?"

Harry Winston looked gravely at her, without answering the question. At this moment there was a general movement towards the door.

"I think," observed Lord Charles, "they are going to supper." As he spoke he drew close to Margaret.

"Margaret," whispered Henry, hastily, "I have a hundred things to say to you—and you are so surrounded here that I despair of getting a quiet moment. Will you let me take you down to supper?"

Margaret smiled, and with her old frankness placed her hand on his arm. Childhood had come back upon their hearts, and in the midst of that brilliant throng their thoughts were busy with memories of the happy hours they had passed together in the Wren's Nest.

They had forgotten all about Lord Charles, till they saw him afterwards a long way down the supper-table, taking wine with Mr. Rawlings.

## CHAPTER III.

### DISCIPLINE AND IMPULSE.

LORD CHARLES ETON was the youngest son of the late Marquis of Westland. He had reason to boast of a line that was at once ancient and respectable; and had the good sense to know that antiquity without respectability is not much to boast of. The Westlands had not the honour of coming in with the Conquest, and were beforehand, by at least a couple of centuries, with the Restoration. They traced their origin neither to Norman adventurers, nor Court beauties, but to a pure Saxon stock. The first Eton on record was said to have been a member of the Witenagemot; a shadowy conjecture supposed to be duly authenticated by an ambiguous signature to one of the old charters. The tradition had come down in the family, and as there was nobody to call it in question, it passed into an historical fact in the

Peerage Books. The patent of nobility was conferred by Edward III. upon Reginald Eton, who held a command under John of Gaunt in the expedition into Gascony, and who married Tacina, daughter of Sir Ralph Gresloyne, and second cousin to the Queen of France. But, as the whole lineage of this noble family may be found at full length in the Extinct Peerage, we may spare ourselves the trouble of embroidering our pages with the numerous intermarriages, heroic actions, and heraldic glories by which the Westlands were honourably distinguished.

We must remark, however, that throughout the early period, the history of the race was a perfect martyrology. The Etons, even to the junior branches, were famous for their gallantry in the field, and their patriotism in the council-chamber. We cannot tell how many of them fell in the ditches of besieged towns, on ramparts and savage plains, abroad and at home; or how many of them were fined, imprisoned, and executed; but it is certain that the heroic spirit of the family might be tracked in blood from generation to generation, and that each new Eton, as he came into life, showed a rampant desire to emulate the deeds of his progenitors.

The obvious influence of an ancient lineage upon

the characters of its descendants is one of the advantages of the patrician order. It insures us a race of men whose pride is at stake in the maintenance and transmission of an honourable reputation. Liberty and equality are grand ideas, although how they came to be associated passeth our understanding. For ourselves, we have no ill-will against liberty and equality, and have nothing to say to the philosophers who want them, except that we wish they may get them. But when the philosophers treat the traditions of old houses as so much waste paper, or faded tapestry, we are afraid that in their eagerness to crack the shell, they let the kernel drop out. Armorial bearings, quarterings, and such like pictorial emblems are no doubt as tawdry and despicable in the eyes of philosophy as gilt gingerbread, or the Lord Mayor's coach; but they have their uses nevertheless. The representative of a long line of hereditary honours has to answer to the dead as well as to the living. He cannot stand with soiled hands in the presence of his "sheeted ancestors." There are fools and profligates in all ranks; but we have this check upon noble fools and profligates, that they occupy the foreground of the stage, and all eyes are upon them. The undeveloped celebrity who,



with knitted brows and folded arms, falls into the group behind, has a sullen conviction in his mind that, if real merit had the precedence of accidental fortune, he ought to change places with the fellow who is mouthing it so villanously in front. But if he did, what then? We should still have actors in *rôles* prominent, and should only be substituting raw recruits or drilled performers.

Lying in a soft and mellow obscurity amongst the more brilliant incidents of the Eton martyrology was a little love-story which had been the subject of many a ballad in the olden time, and which the family cherished as a scrap of poetry let in upon the gorgeous record. It related to a certain valiant knight, one Marmaduke Eton, who, invulnerable in war, was captured during an interval of peace by the beauty of a peasant girl. The feudal blood of the Etons revolted from such an alliance; but Marmaduke, although threatened with disinheritance, kept his faith with Sybil Hunsdon. His kinsmen turned their backs upon him, and cast him out. But he was prouder of his wife than of his kinsmen, and loved her the more for the sufferings his love of her had drawn upon him. In the course of time it hap-

pened, after much sorrow and hardship, that this same Marmaduke, who had borne himself so heroically through adversity, came to be the most prosperous of all the Etons, and the founder of the titles by which they were destined to be distinguished in the Red Book of after ages. The elder branch died out, and Marmaduke recovered his inheritance, which derived additional lustre from the renown he had won in arms. Now Sybil Hunsdon was the mother of that Reginald upon whom Edward III. conferred a patent of nobility; and of the portraits of warriors in chain-mail, and judges in flowery wigs, and ladies in satin and guipure, that graced the great gallery of Hollenden, the family seat in Devonshire, the most prized of all was that of Sybil Hunsdon, the peasant girl. There was another portrait of her in a house belonging to a junior branch of the family in Portman-square, where she appeared to still greater advantage in a russet dress and white coif, seated on a bank, with Marmaduke peeping through a thicket behind, being an exact representation of the first meeting between the rustic beauty and her gallant lover.

The large house in Portman-square, at the time of

our narrative, was the residence of Lord William Eton, the brother of the late marquis, and uncle to Lord Charles; an old bachelor, stern, testy, and concentrating in his own person the accumulated pride of the entire roll of the Westland genealogy. Upon Lord William fell all the mantles of all the Etons. As for the marquis, who was only a few years older than Lord Charles, nobody ever thought of looking to him for the maintenance of the family dignity. There was not a drop of the grand old blood in him. He was a production of the present hour, a mere modern man of fashion, who rendered himself as conspicuous by his dress as Nature had made him by an unmeaning face and a narrow head, terminating above in a point, like the head of a bird, and below in a lanky imperial. The chivalry of his race was extinct in the marquis; but it survived, in all its strength, freshness and vital energy in Lord William, who, deeply mortified at the luxurious effeminacy of the elder brother, bestowed his heart and his patronage upon the younger.

Lord Charles resided with his uncle in Portman-square; or rather lived there in a suite of rooms which were set apart specially for his use; and as his

uncle seldom dined at home, preferring the ease and independence of his club, he may be said to have had the whole of that great house to himself.

On the day after the ball at Park-lane, Henry Winston was to dine *tête-à-tête* with Lord Charles, and to go with him to the Opera in the evening. They had been inseparable at Oxford—intimate, confidential; and in that youthful fervour which leaps over time and space, and sees the ends of things before they have had their beginnings, these two young men swore an eternal friendship. In the short separation that subsequently took place between them, Lord Charles had already established a position as a public man, and Henry Winston had made no advance in life beyond the routine step of matriculation. They met, therefore, under altered circumstances. The alteration was the type of a marked difference in their characters, showing the mental activity and calm perseverance of the one in contrast to the gay heedlessness and undisciplined impulses of the other: cold reason opposed to eager feeling—a strict sense of justice to prodigal generosity—the power of controlling the emotions to incapability of resisting them—strong will to impetuous passions. Yet this very collision of qualities

had hitherto attracted them to each other. But the idle days of college were over. They were now coming out into the world, and had their separate paths and objects to pursue; and the points at which they diverged were now made clear for the first time in a practical light to both. Henry Winston felt all this the moment he entered the drawing-room.

It was a dark, heavy apartment, furnished with great old-fashioned sofas and lumbering chairs, and having upon the whole a solemn and oppressive aspect. There was no light, except such as came fitfully from the fire, which, revealing in snatches the outlines of antique curtains and the formidable frames of the family pictures, brought out its dreariness in full relief. Lord Charles received his visitor rather ceremoniously—perhaps unconsciously from the force of his town habits. Henry Winston looked languid and fatigued; Lord Charles, constitutionally placid and reserved, did not betray a solitary trace of the last night's late hours. After ten minutes of dull commonplaces, they were summoned to dinner.

The impression made upon the guest was much like the shock of a shower-bath, without its invigo-

rating effects. He was chilled by his reception, and by the air of cold grandeur that brooded over the place—it was all so unlike the free and hearty intercourse, and negligent chambers in which their early attachment had grown up. He saw the wide space that lay between them at once, and it sent a bolt of ice to his heart.

The room in which they dined was so large that, lest they should lose each other in its dusky shadows, they were obliged to be boxed in by a couple of stately screens that shut off its distant extremities; and, although a massive chandelier threw a flood of light direct upon the table, Henry Winston could see nothing over the top of the opposite screen but a thick haze, swimming and undulating, and making the scene still more dismal. They were waited upon by a single servant. Henry Winston was so sensitive to every incident of the dinner, that this trivial circumstance, instead of putting him at his ease, increased his acute sense of the change which a brief interval of time had wrought between them. He regarded it as an evidence that Lord Charles did not like to oppress him by any show of attendance, as if he wanted to spare his pride a needless display of the inequality of their fortunes. Henry Winston

did an injustice to his host. Lord Charles had chosen his course in life as a practical politician, and, upon principle, cultivated the utmost simplicity in his *ménage*, as best becoming one who desired to be esteemed as a man of business rather than as a man of rank or fashion. It was an affectation, perhaps; but it was deliberately adopted, and consistently acted upon.

The servant was the impersonation of freezing decorum; a grave, austere man in plain clothes, with a face almost religious in its severity, small glassy eyes, hard features that never relaxed a muscle, and a thick mouth surrounded by a series of curved lines that seemed to carry the dust of centuries in their depths. He looked as if he had descended from generation to generation with the whole family of the Etons, and had come down express to watch over this particular dinner, like a death's head at an Egyptian feast. Henry Winston having never dined with Lord Charles in town before, and bringing with him sundry pleasant memories of their roystering days at college, had, probably, made up his mind for a gay evening. But all his anticipations were annihilated. The stillness and formality of the entertainment—the

intense quietness of Lord Charles—and the glum visage of the attendant, who hovered about his chair like Mephistophiles, filled him with gloom, and he wished himself out of the house twenty times before the cloth was removed.

At last, dinner was over, the grim man in black disappeared behind the screen, and they were left alone. Henry stretched out his legs, and began to breathe more freely.

“You seem tired, Winston,” said Lord Charles.

“Dead beat,” returned the other; “it was so late when we broke up; I had the lights and the music dancing in my head, and hardly slept a wink all night.”

“I think I left you behind me?”

“I stayed to the last. The Rawlings, you know, are very old friends of mine, and it is so long since I have seen them, that I couldn’t get away.”

“Tell me, Winston, who is Mr. Rawlings? They have a story in the House of Commons that he was originally in some menial capacity, and married his master’s widow, and got on in that way. Can it be true?”

“I believe so; but I don’t remember anything about it myself. Since I have known them, which

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is, in fact, all my life—they have always been in good circumstances. But latterly he has made an enormous fortune by railroads.”

“A shrewd, clear-headed man.”

“Very.”

“One would hardly expect from so obscure an origin such refinement in the family. I used to think that your descriptions must have been exaggerated; and I confess I went there anticipating a disappointment. But I found that you had not estimated them half as highly as they deserve. The younger sister particularly. I wish you would try that claret, Winston. Come man, open your eyes, and fill your glass. This is not like old times, Harry!”

“No—it is *not* like them. No matter. Go on. What were you saying about my descriptions?”

“That if you had the slightest tinge of poetry in your nature, you would have idealised the portrait of Margaret Rawlings, instead of painting her like a commonplace beauty in a valentine. That girl has a soul, Winston,—an intellect, which, as far as my experience goes, is rather a rarity in the sex at her age.”

“Did you never see her before last night?”

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"Never."

"Well, I have known her all my life—we were children together; and, although I am not a poet like you, and have not the slightest ambition to be one, I have read the character of Margaret Rawlings more truly. Intellect! That's what you are always running upon. I have never thought of it, for her intellect is the least of her merits. If you had seen her, as I have done, away from all this excitement, you would have discovered that she has a heart, which, in my opinion, is the one charm that makes a woman divine. She is the most unselfish being in the whole world."

"Of course she has a heart—and, I strongly suspect, whatever discoveries you imagine you have made, she hasn't found it out herself yet. But I won't allow you to put on any romance before me. Of all the men I ever knew, you are the least romantic. The very effort at a sentiment makes you look perfectly lugubrious."

"Let us talk of something else, Eton. This gloomy old house of yours has put me into the blue devils. What are you doing? When are we to look for you in the Cabinet? Happy fellow, you are, to have the world before you like a football—

rank, wealth, honours! What chance has a poor devil like me in the race of life against such odds?"

"The chance that every man has who sits down earnestly to his work. And, as we have touched that subject, let me ask you what are your views? It is time you should begin to think of some definite course,"

"Views? I have none. The future is a dead blank before me; and, I don't know how it is, I can't make up my mind to anything."

"That won't do, Winston. The next few years will decide, for good or evil, the current of your life. I thought you were resolved upon the army, and looked to see you gazetted by this time for active service."

"Pshaw! it was only a boyish fancy. I have given it up. No, I see things now in a different light. It would never do to be knocked about the world, without a hope to cling to, or a scrap of earth that one could call one's own."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"Nothing. Dream and be quiet—get old all at once, and die like a respectable gentleman; or, in a fit of desperation, do something to astonish you—I don't know what."

"Yet you talk of giving up your boyish fancies. Why, you talk more like a boy than ever. You used to have a resolute spirit—what is become of it?"

"I tell you what it is, Eton," said Henry Winston, filling up his glass to the brim, and drinking it off, "it is very easy for you to preach a homily to me. When a man is secure in his own position, he can advise like an oracle. Look at the difference in our situations. At Oxford, we were rowing in the same boat, and neither you nor I troubled our heads about what was to happen one week after another. But now we are out on the great highway, the case is altered. I see the alteration clearly. I feel it acutely. You are safe; you may do what you like, make fame at your leisure, or leave it to others: you can live without it. What is there for me? To select a profession, for which I have no inclination or capacity: work hard against the grain of my feelings—grind my heart to powder—and, perhaps, get nothing by it in the end—neither fame nor profit."

"You do yourself an injustice, Winston, in comparing our situations. We have not created them ourselves, and finding ourselves in them, we are

bound to make the most of them. This much, at least, is certain, that anything is better than idleness."

"I like it," returned Winston, carelessly; "it suits my humour. I can't settle myself to work as you can—so, I suppose, I must float down the stream, and take my chance."

"And what will be the consequence? Occupation must be found of some kind. No man can go on wasting himself upon the air for ever; and Henry Winston will be sure to hit upon something to do—fall in love, perhaps, marry, and sink into obscurity under a load of anxieties."

"Then, in your wisdom, one of the penalties of such a position as mine is, that a man ought not to marry?"

"I have strong opinions upon that subject, Winston," replied Lord Charles, gravely.

"So have I," returned Winston.

"No man is justified in incurring the responsibility of marriage, who is not in a position to maintain it. That is an obligation we all owe to society."

"I own no such obligation. Why should a man sacrifice his happiness to society? What has society

done for him, or is ever likely to do for him, that he should immolate himself in its service? A comfortable doctrine for men like you,—but if you would change places for five minutes with me, you would renounce it for ever.”

“You are mistaken. I should act strictly in conformity with my convictions.”

“I believe it,” said Henry Winston, looking rather savagely at Lord Charles; “I believe it. That is exactly what I should expect you to do. You are a man of the world; and you are building up your place in it even now, icing yourself for the frozen height you are to occupy by-and-by, when I shall be drifting about at the mercy of the winds. Your health, Eton!” he continued, wildly, filling up his glass again; “and may I live to see you Prime Minister of England! If I saw you raised to the summit of your ambition to-morrow, I should pity rather than envy a man who held such a creed.” Henry Winston was in a humour to quarrel with anybody, or fight with his own shadow. Lord Charles saw that some secret irritation was preying on his mind, and preserved his composure with well-bred self-control.

“Thank you, Winston,” he replied, “for your

good wishes. But as I don't think it very likely I shall ever be Prime Minister, the probability is that I shall not tax either your pity or your envy. Creed, my dear fellow! A man in public life embraces a set of opinions, and all I meant was that in urging them upon others I should feel bound to act on them myself."

"Then why not adopt reasonable opinions? Why take up a set of opinions that operate as a penalty on one class to the exemption of another? Why shouldn't every man have an equal right to consult his own happiness? You don't know what it is to love, and you don't deserve that any woman should ever love you. You smile at that—but I am serious. I never was more serious in my life; and if ever you marry, I shall look upon your wife as a victim, brought up, garlanded, to the altar. You will marry a fortune, Eton, not a woman. That's the end and aim of your career."

Henry Winston had drunk more than usual; it was evident in his flushed cheek and excited manner; and Lord Charles, perfectly cool and collected, heard him to the end very good-naturedly, and then quietly remarked, "It will be time enough when such an event happens, Harry, for us to com-

pare notes on that subject. I don't think either of us have much thought of marrying at present; at least, I never understood that you had."

"If I had, Eton, there was a time when you should have been the first man to whom I would have confided it. I don't say so now."

"And why not now? I don't ask your confidence, Winston; but I will not surrender my right to it. We have never kept any secrets from each other—and you wrong my friendship if you withhold from me any private feeling in which my advice or assistance would be of the slightest service to you."

"Answer me one question," said Winston; "have you no secret which you have withheld from me?"

Lord Charles looked at him at first very gravely—then a smile broke over his face—and he answered—"None—not one."

"I am satisfied," returned Winston.

The grim man now glided in from behind the screen.

"Well, Fletcher?" inquired Lord Charles.

"The carriage, my lord," said Fletcher, and glided out again.



"Come, Winston, you are full of fancies. Let us see if we can't get rid of them at the Opera. The carriage is at the door."

In a few minutes the two young men—the one self-possessed and unruffled, the other in a shockingly sullen humour—were on their way to the Haymarket.

The house was crowded; and as they passed into the stalls, Lord Charles recognised a number of acquaintances. Henry Winston did not see a human being he knew. He felt more and more isolated, and cut off from the circle of which his friend was so distinguished and popular a member; and the reflections which ensued upon this feeling were not very happily calculated to put him into better temper.

Between the acts, they strolled into the pit. Lord Charles seemed to be intimate with everybody; and the easy way in which he chatted with different parties in the pit tier of boxes, awakened in his wayward companion a bitter sense of the solitude of the great world to a man in his position. He was utterly alone in the crowd. Sickened with the glare, and depressed by a morbid comparison between his own lot and the brilliant life of Lord

Charles, he determined to make his escape at the first opportunity.

By some accident, he suddenly lost sight of Lord Charles, who, an instant before, had been standing close to him. He looked round the pit and into the stalls, but Lord Charles was nowhere to be seen. This was a relief to him. He might now go away without any discourtesy to his friend. And, being at liberty to go, he did what most people, who don't precisely know their own minds, do on such occasions—he lingered a little longer.

It was his first visit to the most magnificent theatre in the world, and the incubus which had hitherto weighed upon him being removed, he indulged his eyes with a general survey of the house. As he glanced from box to box, he caught a glimpse of a face he thought he knew. His heart beat tumultuously. Even at that distance, he felt that he could not be mistaken in the features of Margaret Rawlings. But he was not quite assured, and was afraid to be confident of it, till he saw the radiant head of Clara thrown forward, and gazing down into the pit. He was sure they must have seen him. At all events, the temptation was not to

be resisted, and, scrambling his way into the passage, he flew up the stairs till he gained the lobby of the first circle. He had great difficulty in finding out the box, and had to traverse the round two or three times, and make another ascent, before he reached it. Just as he entered the box, the curtain had fallen on the last act of the opera, and the ladies were rising to go away. The first person he saw was Lord Charles Eton, gently dropping a shawl over the shoulders of Margaret Rawlings.

The mystery of his lordship's sudden disappearance was clearly explained. Henry Winston felt his blood leaping and burning through every vein in his body, and even the pleasure which Margaret exhibited at seeing him could hardly assuage the impetuous passion that raged in him at that moment. A conviction that Lord Charles had treated him with perfidy, seized upon him, and turned his feelings into bitterness and hatred. A very jealous temperament was that of Henry Winston—a mad heart that loved and hated to extremity, too apt to trust and distrust, touched to the core by trifles, and as easily won by kindness as it was stung by neglect or duplicity.

"This is a most unexpected pleasure," said Margaret; "but why did you postpone your visit till we are just going away?"

There was no time for a reply, although Henry Winston had a sarcasm on his lips ready to launch against Lord Charles. Mr. Rawlings hurried them out, and seemed displeased at the interruption; and when Mr. Rawlings was displeased, there was no misunderstanding the expression of his face. Mrs. Rawlings was not of the party, and Henry Winston was resolved to have his revenge by escorting Margaret to her carriage, and consigning Clara to his lordship. But, quick as he was in his tactics, he was foiled. Just as he was about to offer his arm to Margaret, Mr. Rawlings interposed.

"My lord," said Mr. Rawlings, "will you give your arm to my daughter."

Henry drew back, and had the satisfaction of seeing Lord Charles conduct Margaret down the stairs. Clara was leaning on Mr. Rawlings. He was again alone.

The incident was a trifling one; but trifles of this kind are sometimes of grave import in their influence on the lives of the wisest men. Henry lingered behind. He saw them go down the stairs.

Margaret once looked back, but he turned his head away, as if she, too, had conspired against him. The crowd increased in that narrow space; but he still kept them in sight, undetermined what he should do. He felt that he was not in a mood to trust himself again that night in the presence of Lord Charles, whose coolness and propriety always gave him the advantage in moments of heat and irritation; and so, at last, he wilfully lost them in the multitude that came pressing out through the doors. He was thankful for that. It gave him an additional grievance to brood upon; and he went home to his lodgings in so fierce a state of mind that it was a lucky thing he didn't happen to meet Lord Charles on his way.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FULL OF MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS.

It must not be supposed that because Mr. Rawlings accompanied his daughters occasionally to the Opera, and other fashionable convocations, he was giving way to the temptations of high life, and neglecting the primary concern of money-making. On the contrary, it helped him to make more money than ever. The scheme of a great career in London includes a vast deal of hard work in the way of publicity. Mr. Rawlings was alive to that important necessity. His private opinion of Italian music, and the poetry of motion, would not have justified the expenditure of much time or money upon either; but the outlay was amply remunerative as a puff collusive. To be seen in all places where people of wealth and consideration showed themselves, and to have his name, like his railways,

quoted in the newspapers, was a part of the machinery with which he worked. Whoever would thrive out of the common course—be his speciality politics or pills, solids or bubbles—must advertise himself with indefatigable industry. Half the secret of success is notoriety. What do the million know of the exact merits of Moses or the magic strop? Nothing at all; only that they knock up against them at every corner, can't look at a dead wall without being invited to "try" them, or walk the streets without having their greatness thrust into their hands. And so Moses and the magic strop heap up pyramids of cash, while many meritorious strops and Moseses are born to starve unadvertised, and waste their genius in the obscure by-streets and blind alleys of the bewildering metropolis.

Mr. Rawlings had an object in view beyond that of enhancing his position as the lion of the Share-market. He aimed also at getting the lion's share for his daughters in a market of another kind. His ambition soared above his prosperity—as it is in the nature of ambition to do. He had risen with his opportunities, and was equal to them. He saw coronets, and stars, and badges glittering round him, and eagerly wooing his favour. He saw that

money-power is greater than titular-power, and can move at its will the wires of the conventional pageant. And the more familiar he became with the patrician world, which at a distance looks so grand and authoritative, the more he felt how weak and foolish it grows when it comes crawling round the feet of Moloch. And Richard Rawlings resolved to turn this folly and weakness to the profit side of his ledger, under the head of high alliances for his daughters.

As yet he took little thought of Clara's settlement. She was making conquests by the score, and was untouched by any of them; and the safer course was to leave her for a time to herself. The case was different with Margaret, whose sensibility and plastic nature exposed her to a hundred dangers from which Clara was exempt. It was not enough merely to protect Margaret against the hazard of choosing for herself, but to give her the advantages of his own experience by choosing for her—that grave function which some fathers think they can discharge successfully, without much reference to their daughters' inclinations. He accordingly noted all her actions with the keenest scrutiny, and soon discovered that there was an old childish regard



existing between her and Henry Winston, which, under favourable circumstances, might ripen into an attachment—a consummation at which his prudence took serious alarm. While he determined, therefore, that she should not be thrown in the way of a young man who was cast on the world without a profession, and who had no better prospects than the limited competence of an obscure private gentleman, he omitted no convenient occasion of asking Lord Charles Eton to his house. But Rose Winston had just been invited by the ladies to spend a few weeks with them in Park-lane; so that, in spite of all precautions to the contrary, Henry was in the house almost every day, although seldom at the hours when Mr. Rawlings was at home.

The numerous occupations of the member for Yarlton left him little leisure for the details of the domestic plans he had laid down. But he confided in the weight of his authority, and in the marked encouragement he gave to Lord Charles, who frequently dined with him, and was seldom at such times interfered with by the presence of Henry Winston. How that little comedy went forward in the drawing-room during the mornings while Mr. Rawlings was engaged with railway boards and

committees of the House of Commons, and in the evenings when Lord Charles, whose attentions to Margaret speedily became conspicuous to the whole family, may be better understood than described. At present our business is with Mr. Rawlings, who is seated in his small library, busily engrossed over a heap of letters.

Dismissing them one after another with rapidity, he comes to one which must contain something pleasant, for he reads it with a smile, and sets it apart from the rest. It runs as follows:

"Yarlington, 16th Sept.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I have a little favour to ask of you, which I hope you will excuse in an humble and admiring constituent, and old acquaintance, notwithstanding the discrepancy in our situations in life. In fact, I have often thought of writing to you, but, knowing that you have the affairs of the nation on your shoulders, I waited for a suitable opportunity. But you know, my dear sir, that at my age a man can't wait for the grass to grow, and business is not as favourable to me as it used to be, there are so many new lights and pretenders setting up in my line. The railroads have produced a complete metamorphosis in the vital sta-

tistics of this country, and if they have done good in some respects, they have done unaccountable mischief in others, and brought such shoals of competitors into Yarlton that the old inhabitants are entirely swamped. In my profession there are no less than three strange doctors, and four general practitioners, all within eight months; so that you may judge what physic is come to in Yarlton. I have made a calculation of the contingencies arising out of this deplorable state of things, and find, upon a close estimate, that if all the inhabitants that are able to pay, were to fall sick for three months out of the twelve, and if every married woman under five-and-forty (for I don't much count on them after that) were to give a pledge of affection to her husband once a year, the net proceeds wouldn't average 150*l.* per annum, all round, to the medical men of the town. You may rely upon the accuracy of my figures, and you have my authority to make the appalling statement to the House of Commons. If I might take such a liberty with you, I would say that our legislators are sadly in want of such facts as these.

“Now, without some particular mark of distinction, a man in my walk (although ‘Established thirty-five years’ is staring them in the face over the door)

has no chance against such odds, and it occurred to me that you could do me a great service very easily with your overwhelming interest. It is a delicate thing to write to you about, considering how deeply you are concerned in the railroads, but there are calamities, my dear sir, which no human power can avert; and certainly nobody could have foreseen that the railroads would have been attended with such loss of life, such frightful carnage, I may say, as we read of every day in the newspapers. This, of course, can't be obviated, I suppose; but I think it would give some confidence to the public if each line were placed under the care of a well-known medical practitioner, and it is to seek such an appointment that I have made this intrusion on your valuable time. It would set me at once above the heads of all these interlopers if I could put up over my window, 'Surgeon to the Great London and Yarlton Railway;' and I have a strong expectation that it would induce numbers to travel on the line that are at present deterred from doing so.

"Will you, my dear sir, turn this in your mind. I am sure the public would be for ever your debtor, not to speak of the obligation to me. I know it would be an arduous post at my time of life, but I

do not shrink from my duty; and I should never have the happiness of attending on the mangled limbs of any of the unfortunate passengers without a feeling of satisfaction that would bring its own reward.

“May I venture to ask after Mrs. Rawlings and the young ladies? I hope they are in the enjoyment of good health—man’s greatest blessing here below. That’s my maxim with all my patients—it has been my loadstar through life. Honesty, my dear sir, I always say is the best policy; and, although the times are as bad as they can be, my constant study is to keep my friends out of the doctor’s hands. Hoping for an early response,

“I remain, &c.,

“L. POGY.”

“Richard Rawlings, Esq.”

Poor Pogy was evidently going down in the world as fast as Mr. Rawlings was rising in it; and his Utopian ideas about railroad conservation were not likely to break his fall. What could Mr. Rawlings do with this once round and merry philosopher, who had unfortunately survived the age of medical credulity, and been flung at last upon the hard times of iron facts and scientific progress? Pogy had made

a grand sweep of popularity in the golden era which preceded the fatal Apothecaries' Act; but since that time a new generation had sprung up, the Yarlton population, even to the believers in cauls and tar-water, had become more enlightened; younger men had pushed him from his stool, and the Widow Waters, and other gossips, who had acted as a faithful chorus to his uncertificated genius, were gathered to their grandmothers in the churchyard. To lift Pogey up again to his former professional altitude, would have been as impossible as for Pogey to re-animate the victims of the railroad. But Mr. Rawlings did all he could, which was to write a brief letter of regret to Pogey, informing him that there was no such appointment at his disposal, and that if he could suggest any other that might be available, influence should be used to procure it.

And this letter went down to Yarlton, and being written off-hand by a man in the full tide of prosperity to one at the last ebb of fortune, seemed very dreary and heartless to its recipient, and set him thinking gloomily enough about the strange reverses and odd ups and downs of the world. The little parlour at the back of the dispensary looked dimmer and more desolate than ever that night; and its solitary tenant

sat over that letter in a mood of dismal cogitation, reading it again and again, and trying to extract from the turn of its scanty words, and even from the hasty curves of the handwriting, some gleams of lurking kindness. Pogeey was constitutionally an optimist; but he had been latterly hoping so hard against hope that his vivacity in that way was nearly extinguished, and it was a long time before he was able to see how he could make use of Mr. Rawlings. How he did make use of him will appear by-and-by. In the meanwhile we must return to the library in Park-lane.

On the day in question there was to be a general meeting of the shareholders of the London and Yarlington Railway, on which occasion a turbulent discussion was expected touching the financial management. In large bodies there are always some discontented spirits to be found, who are not satisfied with the flattering totals of a balance-sheet, but will insist upon suspecting that there must be some mystification in scientific summaries of accounts which they are not able to understand, and who, in the face of a flourishing dividend, will clamour for explanations which it is not always convenient for committees to supply. Mr. Rawlings had

encountered many such under-currents of obstinate resistance, but his masterly control of difficulties enabled him to ride over them in triumph. It was remarked that every line with which he connected himself was up at a great premium; and as this uniform success invariably ensued upon his measures, it was naturally regarded as a test of the soundness of his judgment. Certainly such wonderful results could have been accomplished only by a singularly sagacious policy, or by some necromancy in the art of drawing up balance-sheets. Now, as the bulk of the public did not believe in magic, they referred these results to the ability of Mr. Rawlings; but a captious minority, who had no faith even in the gains they pocketed, pretended to think that there must be a mystery somewhere, although they could not find it out.

At the head of this minority was Sir Peter Jinks, the bank director. Sir Peter was a man of considerable wealth, amassed as a merchant in the city of London. He belonged to that section of the mercantile community which stands as proudly and ostentatiously on the integrity and respectability of its transactions, as the aristocrat upon his quarterings. His position was in the fullest sense legitimate.



No man could pick out a stain in his life. Sir Peter represented one of the great commercial cities in Parliament, and was a leading man in the House on all questions of trade and political economy. He set his face at the beginning against the railway mania, and predicted that it would end in a convulsion. By nature a hard, just man, the habits of a counting-house, where business was conducted on the strictest principles, had rendered him distrustful of all speculations and speculators. He had witnessed many commercial panics, had watched over many contractions and expansions of the circulating medium, and had arrived at certain conclusions which made him an uncompromising opponent to every agitation in the money-market that threatened to disturb the regular course of business. From the outset of Richard Rawlings' parliamentary career, as a railway magnate, he had vigilantly observed his proceedings, taking upon himself, as a public duty, the task of tracing the rise, progress, and end of what he regarded as a national delusion. In order that he might be the better enabled to pursue his investigations, he purchased shares in the Yarlton line and its dependencies, and narrowly scrutinized the manner in which the committee discharged their functions. It

was clear to him that they were mere puppets in the hands of the chairman; but so consummate was the skill with which the affairs of the company were carried on, that, although he suspected the honesty of every item in the accounts, with all his experience and acuteness he could not detect a single flaw. His doubts, however, were not to be satisfied by a dexterous exhibition of figures, and he continued to hang on the track of Richard Rawlings like a blood-hound.

The eyes of this mercantile lynx had gleamed sometimes so piercingly upon Rawlings as to awaken him to the necessity of caution. But he had no suspicion of the full extent of Sir Peter's design. He only saw in him a shrewd man of business, who scrutinized the affairs of the line because he was personally interested in them, but who, as yet, had said very little openly about them. His reserve, however, did not deceive Richard Rawlings. That sagacious observer was always on his guard against men who, like himself, never take their spring till they are sure of their object.

A few more letters were opened and despatched, when Criquey Snaggs came into the library, and announced Mr. Michael Costigan.

Before Mr. Michael Costigan makes his appearance, we must say two or three words about him.

You had only to look at him, or hear him speak, to be assured that Ireland had the honour of giving him birth. He had the mellifluous brogue which is native to the neighbourhood of Limerick, a place where his ancestors flourished in stone castles long before the flood. The Costigans, descended from a line of kings, were rich in royal blood, but unfortunately in nothing else; and the present representative of that regal race was reduced to the necessity of living upon his wits. The railway mania brought up to the surface many gentlemen whose talents must otherwise have been buried in obscurity; and amongst them Mr. Michael, or as he was jocularly called, Mr. Mick Costigan, shone out conspicuously.

He belonged to no profession whatever. He scorned professions. He existed entirely under "skyey influences," which spurned routine employment or business drudgery. But put him to any meteoric achievement, lying out of the ordinary system, and he carried everything before him. Being wholly irresponsible to himself, or to anybody else, he was the best man in the world for all kinds of eccentric negotiations and social forlorn hopes.

It would be difficult to convey to the uninitiated the exact nature of his connexion with the great railway movement; but as the railways entered largely into the history of the time, and Mr. Costigan represented a new class of industry which they called into existence, we must endeavour to describe his multifarious occupations.

Mr. Costigan had a large parliamentary acquaintance selected chiefly out of that loose squadron of Irish members that used to skirmish so briskly on the outskirts of party questions. The grand thing in concocting the prospectus of a new railway was to get up a committee of apparent responsibility; and as the "promoters" were mostly scampish attorneys, who had no connexions amongst reputable people, the services of Mr. Costigan, who always walked about with a list in his pocket of intimate friends, having what he called "handles" to their names, were inestimable. He could make out a committee in a twinkling; such a committee, too, of M.P.s, baronets, and honourables as came upon the innocent public like a blast of trumpets. To be sure it was only a nominal committee after all, the few names that had any substance attached to them being used without authority, and the rest being

little more than the labels of wasted patrimonies, fit only to make tails for kites. But like a gaudy sign over an ill-furnished hostelry, it answered the temporary purpose of attracting flocks of customers. For the services thus rendered, Mr. Costigan was generally placed on the committee himself, with a batch of shares at his disposal, the payment for which was slurred over by a little private management. Sometimes when a bill was in progress he acted as a sort of flying parliamentary agent, an anomalous employment which we should despair of rendering intelligible by the most minute account of the sundry and complex intrigues it involved. At other times he was engaged in "rigging" the market. This ingenious process consisted of putting out upon the Stock Exchange a quantity of shares in an incipient line, and buying them up himself at a large premium, so as to secure a dazzling quotation in the next day's papers, a bait which the *gobe-mouches* were sure to swallow. Then he was of great value in the committees, for, although he never troubled his head about practical details, and knew nothing of local statistics or any of the other problems of geography and finance comprehended in a railway scheme, he had a gift of speech that

bore down all opposition. Whenever a stormy meeting of shareholders was anticipated, Mr. Costigan was the whipper-in, with a leash of followers at his back and a bundle of proxies under his arm, prepared to beat down the clamour with a terrorizing majority. Such were the agencies by which the railway bubble was blown till it burst. The greatest statesmen have made use of worse instruments on weightier occasions, and Mr. Rawlings did not hesitate to avail himself of the many-sided dexterity of Mr. Michael Costigan.

When the door of the library opened, the visitor came in with a great noise and bustle. That was his way; and his large and ungainly figure gave additional impetus to his vigorous bearing. He had a wild shock head, with hair scattered and starting out at cross angles, bushy whiskers, and a broad face gleaming with an expression of headlong bacchanalian gaiety. His dress was so loose, that it was a wonder how he kept it together upon him. Everything he wore seemed detached, and ready to fly off:—his cravat streamed over his shoulders in a tie that looked as if it were dropping out; his coat was thrown open, and stood away from his body; his waistcoat wandered over his chest, restrained from total separation by only a single

button; and his great trousers were crumpled all round his legs, with the flaps of the pockets hanging down at the sides. The daring negligence of his dress was the type of his character.

"It's done!" he said, as he roared into the room; "you may snap your fingers at them—done as clean as a whistle."

"Sit down, Mr. Costigan," replied Rawlings; "and tell me quietly what you have done?"

"Done?" responded Mr. Costigan; "got a hundred and fifty proxies complete in my hat—*verbum sap.* You don't understand Latin? No matter. We'll dispense with the Latin, and stick to the aboriginal vernacular. Jinks is a cantankerous ould reptile, and a mighty unpleasant object to look at."

"Is he coming to the meeting?"

"Of course he is—but I've made a hole in his pipes that'll spoil his music. The minute he pops up his wizened abortion of a dirty baked face, I've my body-guard ready to give him a shillaloo. We won't let him speak a word—that's the short cut to get rid of him."

"No, no, we mustn't do that. We must hear him, and answer him. Are we sure of a majority?"

"Are you sure it's pelting rain! Majority! Only order out your coach, and let us be off."

"What's the time?"

"I can't exactly answer for the punctuality of my kettle—somehow or other it's always out of order; but I've a sort of superstitious suspicion that we're late."

"Now understand, Mr. Costigan—the business of the meeting is simply to carry the resolutions of the committee. The less discussion the better; and no uproar or hostility against Sir Peter."

"Not the least taste in life. Let him fire away and more power to him."

The meeting was to be held in the great room of the Freemason's Tavern, and thither Mr. Rawlings, accompanied by his robustious ally, hastened at a spanking pace. In the little ante-chamber where the committee assembled for preliminary arrangements, the murmur of the crowd could be distinctly heard, and surging above the general buzz might be detected the ominous coughs and haws! of Mr. Costigan's adherents, who were evidently preparing their lungs for the approaching conflict. At length the committee made their appearance, and Mr. Rawlings, in dumb show, was voted into the chair. You could see at once, from the aspect of the meeting, that there was angry work before them.



The business was opened in a few curt words, by which the shareholders were informed that the meeting was convened to receive the report, and re-elect the committee. The report was then read in due form, and when it was put to the vote, Sir Peter rose, and began with "Before the report is put to the vote, I beg—" he had scarcely delivered himself of half the sentence when an indescribable clamour broke out at the lower end of the room. Mr. Rawlings immediately interposed, and requested a hearing for Sir Peter; but he succeeded only in obtaining a hearing for himself, the row increasing when Sir Peter rose for the second time.

Mr. Costigan's body-guard were clearly overdoing their instructions, and the moment was come for that gentleman to bring his influence into play. Starting up, and running his hands through his hair, as if it were not horrent enough already, he addressed them with a stentorian humour that elicited rounds of laughter. "Readin' and writin'," he said, "was a wonderful invention, but spakin' had the whip-hand o' them. Now we've had the readin' and writin', let us have a little spakin'. Let the gentleman spake—maybe he has a trifle of a report of his own—he's a bank director,

and you know there are quare reports sometimes from the Bank," finishing with a rolling wink of his eye, which drew down fresh demonstrations of applause from his adherents. It may be remarked, *en passant*, of Mr. Costigan, that like most of his countrymen, when he became animated and oratorical, he gave full vent to his rich brogue, which, in ordinary conversation, he kept somewhat under control.

Sir Peter, having obtained a brief silence, proceeded to state his objections to the report. He said that he acted entirely on public grounds—that he did not impugn the integrity or capacity of the committee, or of his honourable friend, the chairman; but that he wished for some information concerning certain items in the balance-sheet. There was a large reserve of shares unaccounted for. What did the committee do with them? He saw names on the committee of gentlemen who were never heard of in the mercantile world before—he wouldn't specify—but he would ask were they all properly qualified? [At this question, Dingle twisted his bamboo between his legs.] How was the dividend created? Where did it come from? It was impossible to get at it by any ordinary process. Was it a fact or a fiction? Did it come from profits, or

was it only taken out of one pocket and put into another? Then there were negotiations of enormous magnitude with other lines. Who authorised them? Who conducted them? Had any member or members of the committee a personal interest in these transactions?

These observations and interrogatories were delivered amidst many interruptions; but when Sir Peter touched upon the personal interest of the committee, it was no longer possible to restrain the zeal of Mr. Costigan's body-guard, who saluted Sir Peter with such a storm of hisses, as compelled him to sit down. Several members of the committee rose at once, but Mr. Costigan was again on his legs, and was heard above them all.

"What's the question?" demanded Mr. Costigan. "I told you you'd have a quare report from the Bank, and now you've had it can you make head or tail of it? I tell you what it is, if you were as strong as Samson, and as ould as Methuselah, and had as many curls in your wig as there are waves in the say, I defy you to unravel what the gentleman means. The Irish is beautiful language, gentlemen, a powerful, prismatic language, and as full of words as an egg is of meat; but you have one word in

your language that beats all the other words hollow, and that word is—*rigmarole*. Now, gentlemen, *rigmarole* may do very well in the bank parlour—but this isn't the bank parlour; this is an open meeting of free-born Saxons who are not to be mystified by that kind of jargon. What was it all about? He'd be a clever fellow that'd tell you that. All I could make out was, that the hon. gentleman wants to know where the dividend comes from. Where does he think it comes from? Of course, I suppose he thinks it comes from the sky. Well, I've no objection to that. It's a celestial shower entirely, and it has my good wishes that it may continue to rain upon us till there isn't a drop left. If the gentleman's afraid of the wet, let him put up his umbrella, or get out o' the way. Question, Mr. Chairman! What's the question?"

This oration utterly overwhelmed the bank director. The small party that supported him cried out in vain for a hearing; Mr. Costigan had effectually put an end to the possibility of any further speech-making on that side. Mr. Rawlings, chagrined at the ludicrous turn given to the debate, and anxious to sustain the formality of the proceedings, begged to say a few words; he was ready to

give any explanations required—the accounts were printed, and in the hands of the shareholders—the committee had arduous and difficult duties to discharge—but it was impracticable on such occasions to go into every insignificant item of expenditure—some confidence must be reposed in the discretion of the committee, or no man would undertake such onerous labours—for his part he had worked day and night, and all the recompense he asked was the continuance of their confidence—was it not enough that their affairs were prosperous?—a large dividend was the best test of ability and prudence in the management—he gave his honourable friend full credit for the excellence of his intentions, and he wished they had the advantages of his experience and high character in the committee; but he felt at the same time that it would be a flagrant injustice to the gentlemen who had served them with such zeal, not to re-elect them—he was aware of only two questions before the meeting—the adoption of the report, and the re-election of the committee, and, without trespassing further on their patience, he would at once put them to the vote.

This clear and satisfactory statement was received with loud acclamations ; whereupon Sir Peter Jinks'

minority made another effort to protest against the proceedings; and intermittent exclamations of "Subterfuge!" "Packed meeting!" and other charges of unfairness assailed the ears of the committee. The confusion became general—everybody was standing up and shouting—the body of the room presented a scene of indescribable uproar, in the midst of which a brief pantomime was enacted on the platform, the purport of which was revealed only to the newspaper reporters, who informed the public the next morning that the resolutions were carried by acclamation, and that the unanimous thanks of the meeting were voted to Richard Rawlings, Esq., M.P., for his able conduct in the chair, and for the valuable services he had rendered to the company in the management of their affairs.

## CHAPTER V.

### TOUCHING A CHORD THAT ALL MEN HAVE PLAYED UPON IN THEIR TIME.

THERE was nothing in the meeting of shareholders, boisterous as it was, to disturb the imperturbable placidity of Mr. Rawlings. He was accustomed to such scenes, and went through them without turning a hair. Having effectually carried his object, he could afford to regard with indifference the opposition of Sir Peter Jinks. Nor did it appear to make any difference between that honourable gentleman and himself; for the moment after the meeting broke up, happening to jostle together in the room, they shook hands in the most friendly manner, and made mutual protestations of the great personal esteem in which they held each other, a sentiment in no way compromised by the criminatory position the shareholder had taken up towards the chairman. Upon such points the ethics of public life are worthy

of attention. It is quite compatible with a deep sense of the integrity of an individual to charge him with a delinquency in his public capacity; that is to say, a man who is privately the soul of honour, may commit with impunity sundry public transgressions from which, as a mere gentleman, socially considered, he would shrink with virtuous indignation. The doctrine is somewhat obscure; but it is very convenient in the transaction of official business.

It happened to be Wednesday, and as there was no house sitting, Mr. Rawlings drove direct home, bringing back Mr. Michael Costigan in his carriage. Mr. Costigan was not on intimate terms with the family, but, being useful to Mr. Rawlings, he had sometimes been asked to stay for dinner, when they happened not to have any company they were particular about. On this occasion the young ladies were driving out with the Baroness de Poudre-bleu, and Mrs. Rawlings expected them home to dinner at seven. They had gone to some French milliner's, to whom the baroness had recommended them, and it was probable, Mrs. Rawlings thought, the baroness might remain and dine with them. But there was nobody else expected, and Mr. Rawlings, not holding the presence of the Poudre-bleu in much



awe or reverence, kept Mr. Costigan to dinner, just as he was, in his flying coat and dishevelled cravat.

Presently the carriage drove up to the door, and Mr. Rawlings and his railway familiar, who were closeted in the library at the end of the hall, could hear ringing voices, and pattering feet up the stone staircase to the drawing-room. Soon afterwards came a loud knocking, and fresh arrivals; and in a few minutes a servant announced dinner.

Upon entering the drawing-room, Mr. Rawlings was surprised to find the party augmented by three persons in addition to the baroness, who, having made up her mind to dine, had contrived to telegraph her intention through the medium of a note in pencil to her son, directing him to come for her just before seven o'clock, so that Mrs. Rawlings could not help asking him to stay; and as he brought his friend Mr. Trainer with him, there was no alternative but to invite him too. The third person was Henry Winston, who happened to meet the ladies by the most extraordinary accident in the world at the door of the French milliner's, and of course accompanied them back. Good-natured Mrs. Rawlings could not avoid asking them all, with a thousand apologies for

a family dinner, which was turned into a pleasant compliment by the baroness, who declared that an impromptu dinner was the most delightful of all things. For her part, there was no house she was so happy in, if they would only let her take them just as they were without any ceremony. And so to dinner they adjourned, as unceremoniously as she could desire, Mr. Rawlings taking charge of the baroness, and Henry Winston securing the hand of Margaret, while Mr. Costigan gave his arm to Mrs. Rawlings, leaving Clara and Rose to Mr. Trainer and Mr. Bulkeley Smirke.

They were all very lively during dinner, which was to be mainly ascribed to the vagrant humours of Mr. Michael Costigan, and the grim witticisms of Mr. Trainer. We should observe of Mr. Trainer that he was a cadaverous-looking man, with a perpetual gloom on his face, which gave a peculiar effect to the funny things he said. He never moved a muscle while other people were breaking their sides; and having a literary reputation which loomed upon the world from a heap of anonymous labours, the particulars of which were known only to his confidential friends, everybody felt it necessary to laugh at his jokes, under an impression that there must be something in them.

There was much merriment about a new novel, which Mr. Trainer slyly turned into ridicule by absurd panegyrics. This brought the baroness's book upon the tapis, Mr. Trainer contriving, as he generally did, some excuse for alluding to it.

"Ah! that poor book of mine!" exclaimed the baroness; "I often wonder I had the courage to publish it. Wherever I go, I hear of nothing else. One would suppose an author was a hippogriff, or some such monster, one is so stared at and plagued."

"That depends, ma'am," observed Mr. Costigan. "A friend of mine wrote a book that nobody ever heard of; and the poor devil is consequently obliged to blow his own trumpet; and, upon my honour and word, it's mighty hard work for a gentleman to be always advertising his genius in company."

"But it saves him advertisements in the newspapers," said Mr. Trainer; "cheap fame."

"Dog cheap," returned Mr. Costigan; "will your ladyship confer your lustre on me, by taking a glass of champagne with me?"

The baroness had the sweetest smile in nature, and never smiled so sweetly as when she wished to appear gracious to people of inferior breeding. Now Mr. Costigan, wild as he was in appearance, was not quite a new specimen of humanity to the

baroness. She had met many Costigans abroad, floating about the German baths; and having had occasion to put their peculiar qualities to the test, she was by no means indisposed to treat this particular Costigan with civility—especially as he was a friend of Mr. Rawlings. Accordingly, she took champagne with him, throwing such an expression of mischievous tenderness into her eyes, as to quicken Mr. Costigan's susceptible pulses in an alarming degree. From that moment his glee mantled up wonderfully; and he drank wine, in turn, with everybody at the table.

"The worst of it is," observed the baroness, "that one never gets a sincere opinion. People always think it necessary to praise one's writings. I should like, just for the novelty of the thing, to hear a little objection from somebody that has really read the work."

"What's the name of the book?" whispered Mr. Costigan to Mrs. Rawlings.

"Well, I forget; something about the Revolution."

"That's enough," returned Costigan. "Objection, your ladyship!" he continued, aloud, addressing the baroness; "it's easy for you to say objection.

I ought to know something about revolutions, for I am a sort of a revolution myself; and I'm curious to know what anybody has to say against your ladyship's unanswerable treatise on the subject. Let them say it—I'm ready to answer them."

"Ah! Mr. Costigan," replied the baroness, with another bewildering smile, "you gentlemen are always so flattering! What I want is to hear the opinion of some of the ladies. Women, you know, write to the hearts of women; as to the men, I don't believe they have such things."

This delicate innuendo drove Mr. Costigan to take refuge in a decanter of sherry, from which he poured out a glass, which he mentally telegraphed to her "ladyship."

"Who has read it?" inquired Mr. Trainer.

"I have," cried Rose Winston.

"Now, then," said Mr. Trainer, "for an honest opinion."

Rose blushed all over, and wanted to escape; but she was stormed by a general demand for her criticism; and she went on.

"Well, the book is very clever, of course. I know nothing about that. But shall I tell you exactly what I think?"

"Of all things," replied the baroness.

"Don't spare it," cried Mr. Trainer; "authors; like kings, seldom hear the truth from their friends."

"Then, first of all," observed Rose, clearing her merry voice, "my opinion is, that I wish the baroness had not made Agatha marry that horrid count."

"Not marry the count?" exclaimed Costigan; "then I'd like to know who you would have her marry?"

"Her own true lover, François, to be sure," was the reply.

"That's natural enough in a young lady," observed Costigan; "but as a political critic, I must say that it was more consistent with a revolution that she should marry the count. It was a deep touch, that!"

"And to leave her lover because he was poor, for one she didn't care about, merely because he had a fine title," replied Rose, bridling up indignantly.

Harry Winston had listened to this latter part of the conversation rather uneasily. He was sitting next to Margaret; and when Rose spoke of leaving the poor lover for a man with a fine title, he inad-

vertently looked at Margaret—these young people are always so ready to turn everything to their own account! Their eyes met, and were full of a piteous intelligence, which did not stand in need of words to make it perfectly clear.

“But the sequel,” cried Costigan; “doesn’t that settle the business to your satisfaction?”

“I think it makes it worse,” answered Rose; “the count commits suicide, which, I am sure, nobody was sorry for, and Agatha goes into a convent.”

“And where would you have her go?” demanded Costigan, coming to the charge again.

“I would not have her go anywhere,” said Rose; “but the moment the count was dead, I would have made her marry poor François.”

This courageous criticism met the entire approval of all the young people present; and Mr. Costigan’s protest on the ground of political expediency was outvoted by a handsome majority. Even the baroness admitted that, so far as sentiment was concerned, Rose was right; and Mr. Trainer thought it was the highest compliment to the book that Miss Winston should feel as much interest in the characters as if they were all real; adding that, in

his opinion, it was the most profound novel of the day—an opinion in which Mr. Costigan loudly concurred.

Soon afterwards, the ladies rose to retire. The movement was marked by some little silent diplomacy. Henry Winston contrived to squeeze Margaret's hand as she fidgeted out of her chair, continuing, with his head apparently turned in another direction, to follow her with his eyes till she was out of sight. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was not unobservant of these proceedings; and, being in a very sullen humour, pretended a perfect indifference to the ladies—dusting his waistcoat with his napkin as they passed, and with the other hand twirling his miniature moustache. Mr. Costigan, upon the first intimation of the break-up, had rushed to the door; and there he stood, making magnificent genuflections, topping the climax of his aboriginal gallantry, when the baroness came, sweeping by, with an air of sweetness, that made him throw his coat nearly off his shoulders, as he returned, full of triumph, to the table.

“Come, boys,” cried Mr. Costigan, already betraying the excitement of the wine he had taken



during dinner, "fill your glasses for a toast. May I give a toast, my noble hero?"

"Anything you please, Mr. Costigan," replied Richard Rawlings.

"No skylights or heeltaps," exclaimed Costigan, standing up with oratorical pomp, and looking round to see that every glass was full; "Sir,—there are moments when the human heart is agitated by emotions—don't laugh, young man, you'll know better when you grow older. We've enjoyed, sir, at your hospitable board this day an intellectual feast that'll be remembered by our great grandchildren, to whom we will feel it our duty to communicate the rich treat. A grateful posterity, sir, will hold the day in reverence, and every mother's son o' them will emulate your example, and consider himself bound to give a dinner on the occasion. But I appeal to every one o' you, in your concave and convex connexions with the world at large, as husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, lovers, and cousin germans, what would this intellectual treat have been without the presence of lovely woman? The eye of woman, sir, is the glowing refulgence that lights up the transparency of human life. Is there

a heart amongst you that doesn't respond to my appeal? Sir, the extent of our obligations to that sex is unknown. From the cradle to the grave—I speak advisedly—woman is with us everywhere. We are born of woman, and when we die we go back to her arms, for aren't we then put to sleep in our Mother Earth? Everything that's beautiful and grand and glorious is of the female gender. Isn't Liberty a woman? Isn't Britannia a woman? and when does she look so like a real divinity as when she's leaning on her anchor, and shaking hands across the green waters with her sister Hibernia? Aren't the Muses and the Graces women to a man? And the only bull in the fine ancient ould heathen mythology was making Love a little boy. If we had had the making of the gods and goddesses in Ireland, maybe we wouldn't have put petticoats upon Cupid, and converted him into a girl! If Love isn't a woman, the divil's in the dice! A bumper, boys, for woman, upstanding, and three times three, and all the honours! Immaculate, immutable woman! Take the fire from me: The ladies, sir, that have left us, and may they never leave us again, and my blessing be on them wher-

ever they go. One—two—three—hurrah! bathershin!—one—two—three, &c., &c., &c.”

To give greater energy and effect to his motions as fugleman to the “fire,” Mr. Costigan leaped upon his chair, and, planting one foot upon the table, brandished his glass violently in the air. Mr. Rawlings had some difficulty in subduing his enthusiasm, and prevailing upon him to resume his seat. The fact was, he had indulged too freely, and having got it into his head that he had made a splendid impression on the baroness, his hilarious nature was thrown into a condition of ungovernable excitement.

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, whose face looked like a piece of white satin, happened to be seated exactly opposite to him; and he sipped his wine with so sickly a hesitation, and betrayed so visible a horror of Mr. Costigan, that the riotous Milesian fell foul of him all at once with that rich dare-devil banter which has so much whimsicality and sunshine in it that its victim doesn't exactly know whether he ought to be vexed or pleased—to laugh at his tormentor or knock him down. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke took it all as a very grave offence, and made two or

three attempts to say something stringent and dignified, which only laid him the more bare to the unmerciful raillery of the brawny humourist. Henry Winston took advantage of a roaring broadside from Mr. Costigan, to make his escape to the drawing-room, whither we will follow him.

The ladies were scattered about ; the baroness on an ottoman with Clara—Mrs. Rawlings indulging her ruminations in an easy chair, comparing, probably, the points of difference between Park-lane and the old inn in Gracechurch-street—and Rose Winston and Margaret (they had always been confidential) in deep discourse in a corner. Henry was not two minutes in the room when he was at their side.

And now for the secrets.

Rose was going to be married ! Going is a long word in such matters, when the momentous action itself is as yet dependent on circumstances ; but young hearts are apt to make it very short. She was engaged to a clergyman in the country, just ordained, and only waiting for a curacy to enable him to make himself the happiest man in the universe. There was little fortune at either side, except a trifling annuity which the good old Mr.

Winston was willing to allow them to eke out their income ; but there was a great deal of love, and that was all the riches they cared for. True to its core was the heart of Rose Winston, who already longed for her month in town to be out, that she might return again to the tranquil country ; and what with fervent talk about the hedge-rows, and the fields, and green solitary places, and peeps into her daily love-letters, she and Margaret never felt themselves so happy as when they got away from the crowd, and gave free vent to their feelings. Margaret had her secret, too, and Rose quickly detected it. In such intimacies it is impossible to hide the first troubles of the heart, and trouble was already casting its shadows over the heart of Margaret. Rose was her *confidante*, and, although her own brother was the person most deeply interested, Rose up to this moment had never betrayed her trust even to him. The heroism of a purely-minded girl is proof against the world.

There was no alternative but to confess to Rose what her penetration, rendered keen by sympathy, had already discovered. And Margaret did confess unreservedly. Strong antagonisms, and the pressure of circumstances, had brought her love to

flower so rapidly that she trembled to acknowledge even to herself how suddenly the feeling had become developed, and how completely it had taken possession of her. Had things gone on in the ordinary way, it might have lingered long before it came to maturity, as fruits ripen slowly and seasonably in the sun that are quickened out of season in the hot-house. And so it was with Margaret Rawlings.

In the last month or two, the visits of Lord Charles Eton had become more and more frequent; and his object was now too obvious to be mistaken. At first, Margaret did not see this—it made no impression on her. She liked Lord Charles, and received his attentions simply because they pleased her while she was yet free to be pleased. She was the last to see what others saw plainly. The first thing that awakened her suspicion was the marked coolness that had grown up between Henry and Lord Charles. She attributed it in the beginning to waywardness and caprice, or hardly thought of seeking a cause for it, till it showed itself in so many unmistakeable shapes in her presence as to force upon her the full conviction of the truth. Having once taken alarm, the most insignificant trifles became intelligible, and threw a flood of light upon

her position. And now she discovered what she had hardly observed before—the fretted spirit and haggard looks of Henry Winston, the canker that was feeding on his life, the unsettled mind, the alternate fits of morbid despondency and reckless indifference to the future. And now, too, she discovered the feeling of which she had hitherto been unconscious, and which had laid its tender roots in her heart long ago in her happy childhood.

From that moment a restraint was over all her actions. The assiduities of Lord Charles became irksome and painful; but she was afraid to betray her dread of them, under the growing conviction that they were encouraged by her father. The fear of bringing matters to issue made her equally reserved and timid in her conduct to Henry Winston. And thus she was obliged to endure, without seeming to observe it, the daily sight of his silent agonies, to see his life wasting away under her eyes, without daring to stretch forth her hand to save him.

We are afraid that Rose Winston, who was so profoundly happy herself, and who was so anxious to put an end to Margaret's misery, had a wicked design in her head when she spoke out so boldly at

dinner. Her courageous vindication of the rights of true love, through a story to strangely applicable to the situation of her friend, looked very like a stratagem to take Henry and Margaret by surprise. She had her own notions on the subject, highly coloured, of course, by her own position, and she thought it was the height of folly and cruelty in this pair of suffering lovers to hide their feelings from each other any longer. It was on this very point she was talking to Margaret when Henry joined them.

"What, Harry!" she cried; "pray, sir, who sent for you? I hope you don't imagine we couldn't amuse ourselves without you?"

This savage little speech was spoken with a playful significance, which Henry, who, with the pressure of Margaret's hand tingling at the tips of his fingers, was in the right mood to interpret exactly as it was meant. So, drawing a chair close to them, he asked them what mischief they were plotting.

"Suppose you try and guess," said Rose.

"Well," he replied, "perhaps you were discussing that difficult question you started at dinner upon the baroness's book. Very difficult, and yet, to me, very easy."



"Not so bad a guess," said Rose, slyly pressing Margaret's arm; "is it, Margaret?"

"I should like to hear Margaret's opinion upon it," said Henry.

"So should I," observed Rose.

"But I can't give an opinion," said Margaret, "for I have only just begun the book. You must wait till I have read it."

"That's only an excuse," said Rose; "now, Harry, state the case, and make her pronounce judgment."

"The case," said Henry, "is simple. I will put it in a few words. There is a lady who has a devoted lover—one who has known her long, from their youth upwards; he has neither rank nor riches to offer her—nothing but his love. Changes take place in their lives—new scenes, new temptations, and the poor lover is doomed to find a rival in the person of a man of title, whose wealth and station overshadow him. What should the lady do?" Henry faltered a little.

"How can I answer such a question?" said Margaret. "So much depends on circumstances."

"No, Margaret," cried Henry, eagerly; "nothing on circumstances—all upon the heart alone. If she loved him as he believed she did—happier for him

he were dead if it were otherwise!—should she not risk all, forsake all, to reward his devotion? How would *you* act in such a case?"

"I? I can't tell—I can't imagine myself in such a position."

"Think, Margaret—if the life of one who loved you were in your hands, how would you decide?"

"While you are thinking, Meg," cried Rose, breaking away from them, "I have something to say to Clara—I shall come back in a minute."

In vain Margaret looked beseechingly at Rose to stay where she was. The lovers were alone.

"Every moment is precious, Margaret. It is *my* doom you must pronounce—we have each of us long foreseen this moment, and now it is come,—do not turn from me. I cannot live another day through the tortures I am suffering. One word will console and strengthen me. Speak it and save me!"

"Henry—not now. Spare me for the present—give me a little time."

"You know not the misery to which your reserve condemns me. Have pity upon me; utter the one word 'hope,' and I will be patient. From the days of our childhood, you have been the idol of my heart. Even at college I could think of nothing

else, and he who has thrust himself between us knows it—he knows it, and, with his superiority of birth and influence, he would mercilessly betray and destroy his friend. But he shall answer for it.”

“No, no, Henry, for my sake—promise me that you will not commit any rash act.”

“I will promise you anything—God knows, I love you too well, too deeply, to alarm you by a threat—I did not mean that—but the struggle is fearful—it is killing me. I could bear it all, and worse a thousand times over, if I were sure—yet why should I doubt? There is no truth in the world, if your eyes have not confessed a feeling which I only ask you to put into words to make me happy. Why do you listen to me, if you do not love me? Speak, Margaret—in mercy to me—speak one word.”

“Be satisfied, Henry; you have nothing to fear from Lord Charles Eton.”

“Then why is he here so constantly? I may be secure as yet, but who can answer for the future, if opportunity be given to him to persevere?”

“I can. Will you rely upon my word? Promise me to take no notice of his visits, and I will be frank with you.”

“ I swear it solemnly.”

“ He is a friend of my father’s. It is my father’s pleasure that he should come here. I cannot help it, but I will not disguise from you that his visits have made me unhappy since I have seen what you have suffered. I have seen it, Henry, and been silent. I have felt it, and tried to save you all the pain I could. But what can I do? You do not suffer alone.”

“ Thank you, from my soul, Margaret, for that sweet word. Go on,—let me hear your voice again,—it falls like music on my heart,—why, what a fool I am! Speak again,—I am in heaven!”

“ Be patient, dear Henry. There—there.”

“ I will trust all to you, Margaret. You are wiser and calmer than I am. Only give me a pledge that you will be mine, for I know they will try to separate us. What can I rely upon,—poor, without a profession, against a man who has your father on his side, and rank and power?”

“ Your best reliance is on the truth of her you love. Do you believe that all these years, through which we have grown up together, have left no sacred memories in my heart? Do you suspect that I am dazzled by this hollow life? If you do, you

wrong me. What pledge more do you require? You must not give way to fancies,—we are both placed in a difficult position,—let us trust to time. Can I say more? Should I say so much if I were not interested in your happiness—if—if—my own did not depend on it? See—they are coming. Patience—patience, dear Henry.”

At that moment the drawing-room door opened, and the first person that made his appearance was Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, looking slightly flushed, followed by Mr. Rawlings and the rest of the gentlemen. Henry had just time to snatch up Margaret’s hand, and impress a burning kiss upon it, in a flutter of agitation, which could hardly have escaped notice, had it not been that all eyes were attracted by the noisy entry of Mr. Michael Costigan.

The jovial Milesian, labouring under the double inspiration of wine and beauty, had no sooner found his way into the room, than with a rather zigzag and tempestuous movement, he made his way direct to the table where the baroness was seated.

“I have the honour to announce to your ladyship,” he began, “that during your absence, ma’am, we drank the ‘Ladies,’ with all the honours of war. The ladies, and no surrender. ‘First flower of the

earth and first gem of the sea!' We embraced the whole sex in one comprehensive sentiment."

"Will you take coffee, Mr. Costigan," said Mr. Rawlings, trying to get him away from the table.

"No, sir! Coffee? It would be a gross insult to your claret. I have a veneration for your claret. I hold the name of Sneyd in reverence, and if you insist upon my finishing the night with you, it isn't with coffee you'll put me off."

Wheeling round again to the table, and nearly upsetting a salver which a servant behind him was handing round, he discovered that the baroness had left her seat, and retreated to another part of the room.

"The bird's flown! I hope we haven't frightened the ladies. It's a curious fact in my career that the ladies have always been remarkably partial to me, and if I am called upon to explain the reason of it, I should say it's because I'm remarkably partial to the ladies myself. What are we going to do? Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you, my gay young sprisan?" he cried, catching Mr. Bulkeley Smirke by both shoulders, and sinking together with him into a chair.

There was a slight stir of alarm at the other end of the room, and Mr. Rawlings, apprehensive that this rough play might end in a quarrel, came to the assistance of Mr. Smirke, who was endeavouring to extricate himself violently from the powerful grasp of the Irishman; but there was no great need of his interposition. Mr. Costigan was only in a mood of rampant fun, very perilous, to be sure, when practised upon people who were not disposed to put up with it, but harmless enough if it were allowed to have its own way. The danger consisted in crossing Mr. Costigan's humour, and Mr. Rawlings was sufficiently aware of the peculiarities of his friend, to know how to deal with him at such moments. Getting rid of Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, who was not sorry to make his escape, he drew Mr. Costigan into a corner, and then gradually succeeded in coaxing him out of the room.

The party soon afterwards began to disperse. Henry was the first to go. His heart was brimful, and his last look into the eyes of Margaret sent him off with a delicious sensation that totally revolutionised his whole being. The gloom of months had cleared off and vanished. His pulse beat wildly, and he took the stairs at a bound, longing to be alone, that he

might indulge his imagination in a reverie over his new-born happiness.

The first object that presented itself when he got into the street was Mr. Michael Costigan, leaning in a posture of profound cogitation against the rails. Henry did not perceive him till he knocked up against him.

“ Mr. Costigan !” he exclaimed.

Spinning round with an indescribable leer on his mouth, and twining one hand into Henry’s arm, while he held the rails with the other, Mr. Costigan replied—“ Hush !—that ould Rawlings is a humbug, to turn people out at this hour of the night upon a cup of dirty coffee !—coffee !—he asked me to take coffee !—very well. Remember that—coffee ! Will you stick to me now ! What countryman are you ? Divil a matter. Will you stick to me ?”

“ Certainly. Which way are you going ?”

“ Going ? Going back again, as a matter of course. Justice for Ireland, and confusion to coffee. Coffee ! think of that ! Mick Costigan drinking coffee at this hour of the night ! Stick to me now, and we’ll knock up ould Rawlings for a glass of punch.”

Mr. Costigan, suiting the action to the word, proceeded to carry his proposal into effect, by making a



desperate lurch at the handle of the bell. Henry Winston caught his arm, and succeeded, with difficulty, in drawing him away from the door.

"Not for the world. My dear sir, it would be no use. If you want punch, we can easily get it as we go along. Come."

Costigan yielded to his remonstrances reluctantly, and continued muttering "Coffee!" all the way down Park-lane into Piccadilly. He evidently regarded the coffee as a sort of personal insult.

As they walked towards the Haymarket, he made many dead stops, diversified occasionally by asking the passers-by if they'd like a little coffee. Then he wandered into a rambling dissertation on the character of Mr. Rawlings, during which the name of Lord Charles Eton struck upon the ear of his companion.

"Lord Charles Eton!" exclaimed Henry Winston, "what of him?"

"Why, he's one of them, that's all."

"I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"Where's the place we're to get the punch?"

"Oh! we're just coming to it. What do you mean by saying that Lord Charles Eton is one of them?"

"What are you bothering me about? Isn't he going to be married to one of the daughters?"

"How do you know this?"

"How do I know it? The devil a step farther I'll travel with you till I get a glass of punch."

"Well, then, here—this place will do—in—in!"

They had arrived at the door of a tavern in the Haymarket, and Henry hurried the thirsty Milesian through the passage into the public room. The glare of numerous gas-burners suspended from the walls and the ceiling smote his eyes fiercely as he entered; but Mr. Costigan strode into the white light with the unblinking gaze of an eagle, and standing in the middle of the room, with his coat streaming off his shoulders, his handkerchief hanging loose, and his arms akimbo, called out, "Waiter!" with a power of lungs that made sundry people who were scattered about at the tables start in their seats, and turn round to look at him. Henry, who was unaccustomed to these scenes, felt considerably abashed, and, not a little ashamed of being seen in such company, took refuge in an obscure corner, and beckoned Costigan to follow him.

"Materials!" cried out Costigan to the waiter, as a slim young man danced up to the table, and began

to brush it with the tip of his napkin. "Don't mind the table, but bring up materials for two."

"Sir!" said the waiter, opening his eyes very wide.

"It's a remarkable fact that you don't understand your own language. Whisky, sugar, and hot water. Do you understand that? And mind that it's hot—screeching hot, or I'll make a public example of you, you thief!"

Henry Winston was all eagerness to learn what Costigan had to communicate about Lord Charles, but it was idle to renew the conversation till the "materials" were served. The few minutes that intervened before the waiter returned seemed a century. Now then! thought Henry.

"You couldn't oblige us with a cup of coffee, could you?" inquired Costigan.

"Certainly, sir. Coffee for two?"

"Make yourself scarce, you villain!" cried Costigan, whose joke, although it was now apparent to the waiter, sent that respectable young man away looking very oddly out of his literal faculties at the strange humourist.

The topic was at length brought round again.

"Well," said Costigan, "my authority for it is

ould Rawlings himself; he didn't swear me to secrecy, and if you want my private opinion on the matter, I think he's taking his dealing trick out of his lordship."

"Mr. Rawlings himself! For heaven's sake, what did he say to you?"

In answer to this question, Mr. Costigan entered into an elaborate account of some conversations Mr. Rawlings had had with him on the subject, but it was so embroidered with whimsical parentheses and metaphorical figures, that Henry Winston was considerably perplexed to pick out the substance of it, which amounted to this: that Mr. Rawlings had set him to find out what were Lord Charles's expectations; that, although Lord Charles had not formally proposed for Margaret, Mr. Rawlings was in daily expectation of a proposal, and had made up his mind to accept him; that he had not communicated his intention to his daughter, and did not mean to speak to her about it till the whole affair was settled.

This intelligence produced a terrible effect upon Henry Winston. The vision of happiness he had been going home so exultingly to contemplate was dispersed, and heavy clouds had set in in its place. His agitation did not escape the scrutiny of Mr.

Costigan, who at all times had a ready sympathy for the distresses of lovers, but chiefly in his cups.

"Now, make me your friend," said Costigan, "and I'll stand to you like a man. I see it all. You love the young creature yourself. Now just answer me one question. Does she return your passion?"

Henry was humiliated at that moment by a consciousness of shame and debasement that a feeling so sacred, which he had hitherto concealed in the recesses of his heart, should become a topic of conversation in such a place and with such a man. He shrank from it, as from the touch of contagion. But Costigan, spotted all over as he was with the leprosy of drink, had, nevertheless, a lurking refinement in his nature upon this one solitary subject of love, and seemed to understand at once the scruples of his young companion.

"This is not the place or the time to talk about it," said Costigan, in a half-whisper; "keep up your heart, and we'll speak about it again. But, mind what I tell you, don't betray yourself to ould Rawlings. He's a bitter flint. Money's the god of his idolatry, and he'd sacrifice his daughter's affections every day in the week and twice of a Sunday to gratify his ambition. My darlin' boy, depend upon

Mick Costigan. There's few men of my day has seen more duels and abductions, and if I don't put you in the way to circumvent the parental despotism, it's mighty odd, that's all! Waiter, have you any more whisky in the house? because, if you have, there's a couple of gentlemen here would be after troubling you for ditto repeated."

"The bar's closed, sir," said the waiter.

"Then open it again," returned Costigan.

"Impossible, sir; my mistress has taken the key up to bed."

"Does she go to bed with the key? 'locked in beauty's arms!' Well, you needn't disturb your mistress, but if you'd just waken the key, I dare say it'd come down and do us a friendly turn."

"Can't be done, sir. The bar is closed, sir."

"To the divil with the bar!" roared Costigan, leaping up out of his seat, and advancing upon the waiter in full sail, with pennants flying, and his face flushed to the roots of his hair. The few persons who yet remained in the tavern got up out of their seats, anticipating a row, and the waiter fled to the end of the room. Costigan opened upon the company with a brilliant appeal to the liberty of the subject, against the insolence of publicans who were

licensed only for the public accommodation. Henry was in no disposition to embark in the controversy, and, glad of an excuse to make his escape, quietly stole after the waiter, paid the bill, and passed out into the street.

## CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE PLAINTIFF IN THIS SUIT ENTERS A DECLARATION.

As wretches in a storm nestle together for warmth and shelter, so lovers cling closer to each other in difficulties. The discovery of Mr. Rawlings' design extracted from Margaret and Henry the most intense declarations of mutual devotion. A cruel father may tear true hearts asunder; but, as we very often see upon the stage, they will take the earliest opportunity of rushing into an embrace. And thus Henry and Margaret may be said to have stood, metaphorically, entwined in each other's arms, awaiting the impending descent of parental despotism. What could they do? They had not a single adviser in the world except Rose, and she was so frightened and bewildered as to be incapable of counselling them. Henry thought of asking the advice of Mr. Costigan; but a vivid recollection of the *tableau* in which he left that gentleman figuring in the tavern,



restrained him. Margaret had a notion of consulting her mother; but, upon a little reflection, she was afraid that her mother's interference might do more harm than good. It may appear strange that she did not confide her situation to Clara. This is one of the mysteries of affection which will be perfectly intelligible to all sisters who love each other as these two did. There was nothing on earth she would have concealed from Clara. But there was peril in this business, and she resolved not to implicate her darling in it. She knew Clara's generous nature, and dreaded the consequences of involving her in an act of disobedience to her father. She, therefore, resolved, in the unselfishness of her love, to bear her sorrow alone, trusting from day to day that some lucky accident might deliver her from it.

In the mean while Lord Charles Eton was calmly maturing his purpose. He liked Margaret for her own sake; but he was a prudent man, and looked also to her fortune. There was little enthusiasm in his character, and that little had been shaped and controlled to practical uses by a strict course of discipline. As a statesman, he had the impassive temperament of William Pitt, to whom the world never gave credit for any capacity of love or ten-

derness. But it could hardly be predicated of Lord Charles Eton that, like William Pitt, he should ever be caught, in an unguarded moment of passionate gallantry, drinking out of a lady's shoe. Lord Charles was always in his part, as the actors say.

Ambition was the mistress to whom his lordship really paid his addresses, and he selected Margaret to be the priestess at the shrine. A younger son, he was stinted in fortune. He had expectations from his uncle; but they were only expectations, and wealth was indispensable to the career that lay before him. He was not in a position to marry for love; and love was not exactly the position for which he was disposed to marry. He was like hundreds and tens of hundreds of men, who assure you they could never bring themselves to marry *for* money, but who, nevertheless, can never prevail upon themselves to marry *without* it; excellent men, who neither create happiness for their wives, nor heap misery upon them, but plunge them into a cold solution of domestic respectability, in which both are neutralised. How many ladies are there who live in this tranquil way, apparently possessing everything to make life very comfortable and agreeable,

and looking quite placid on the surface, while their hearts are perishing!

It was within a few weeks of the close of the session. Members were already making their preparations for the Christmas festivities; and several invitations, which he had not made up his mind to answer, lay upon Lord Charles Eton's table. He paced his library with the aspect of a man who was revolving a grave subject in his thoughts; and, after many pauses, he flung himself into his chair. There was still some hesitation. He was traversing all the points of the question before he committed himself to paper. Then came the decision, slowly but distinctly, resolving itself into a short note, deliberately written and pondered over for a few moments before it was sealed. When it was finished, his lordship rose and rang the bell.

Fletcher glided into the room.

"Take this note," said Lord Charles, "to Mr. Rawlings. You need not wait for an answer. Is my uncle at home?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Where is he?"

"In the drawing-room, my lord."

"That will do. Go immediately with the note."

Fletcher glided out.

A few more strides up and down the room showed that there yet remained a source of uneasiness behind. The moment was now come upon the issue of which he had staked his future course. He proceeded to the drawing-room, and was just in time to intercept his uncle, who was going down to his club.

"My dear uncle," said Lord Charles, "will you give me ten minutes before you go out?"

Lord William could perceive that there was something more than usual in his nephew's manner, and—little dreaming of the nature of the communication—he laid down his hat, and, taking a chair opposite to him, said, "Well, Charles, I am at your service: what is it?"

"In the first place," said Lord Charles, "I wish to say that I am bound to your lordship by so many obligations, independently of my respect for your judgment, that I could not think of taking any great step in life without first consulting you."

"Precisely what I should have expected. Your brother is a frivolous, empty jackdaw—a fool, sir, who has no more notion of what is due to his position as the representative of one of the most

ancient houses in the kingdom, than if he were the son of a dancing-master. I look to you to sustain our name. You have begun well—persevere, and the highest distinctions are within your grasp.”

“The course upon which I have embarked is arduous and difficult,” observed Lord Charles.

“No doubt of it; but the greater the difficulty, the greater the glory.”

“A public man, uncle, has many difficulties to contend against besides those of party warfare. I feel this strongly, and it has latterly given me much serious consideration.”

“I don’t clearly see the drift of the observation.”

“I will explain myself. No man can aspire to a high position in England, without the command of adequate resources. It is the vice of our system. The power of our aristocracy does not reside simply in a tradition—it is preserved and fortified by wealth.”

“M——m——ha! Go on!”

“The great leaders of our political parties have not acquired this ascendancy by talent alone. They are backed by the means of collecting their forces round them, and of impressing themselves upon their age by a constant appeal to its material sym-

pathies. The man who distinguishes himself in public life, and who is doomed to an obscure struggle in private, is always a mark for distrust and sarcasm. Not alone is his actual influence doubtful and contracted, but the purity of his motives is suspected. If he is on the popular side, he is a disappointed man; if he is with the government, he is looking for a place. Personal independence alone secures the public man against imputations, and enables him to achieve great objects."

"Well—and you have been applying this remarkable discovery to your own case."

"Exactly. My fortune is so disproportionate to the views which, under your sanction, I have ventured to entertain, that I assure you I am much disheartened at the contemplation of my prospects. As it is, I should absolutely despair, if it were not for the advantages I derive from your liberality."

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"It occurs to me, Charles, that you have stumbled upon a palpable absurdity. What has a man who is working in the public service to do with an extravagant establishment? Besides, that is a thing neither you nor I can afford. Now, I am willing to help you to the utmost; my own personal expenses are nothing; and as far as my fortune goes it is pretty

well expended upon this house and Datchley, both of which are always at your service. But if you mean that you expect me to make a settlement upon you, I frankly tell you I will do nothing of the kind. While I live, I will preserve in my own hands the power of keeping the old family pictures in their frames at all events."

"My dear uncle, you entirely mistake me. I never thought of such a thing. I have already pressed too heavily upon you; and my desire was to consult you on a step which might enable me rather to relieve you of the pressure than increase it."

"And that step is——"

"Marriage."

Lord William looked at him hesitatingly for a few minutes, and then went on—"Marriage! that is a step, indeed, Charles. Well, sir."

"I thought it more prudent not to trouble you on the subject, until I had weighed it maturely in my own mind; and I hope you will have no reason to think I have decided rashly."

"I hope not. You say you have decided."

"Well—I mean——"

"Let me understand clearly what it is you mean. If you have decided, why do you trouble me on the subject?"

"No—that is—I have not committed myself—but I confess my reason and my inclination are made up, and it was upon that I wished to have the benefit of your lordship's advice."

"H—m! and if my advice shouldn't happen to jump with your reason and inclination, I suppose you are prepared to throw it overboard?"

"Your lordship is too generous to make conditions with me beforehand."

"Why, it seems, it is you who make conditions. But we are wasting time. Pray proceed."

"I am well aware of your lordship's strong opinions on the subject of family alliances; yet there are considerations which may sometimes be permitted to overrule our scruples on the score of birth."

"I know of none, sir. I read of such things in trashy novels, but I never knew them hold good in real life. I see plainly what's coming. You have fallen in love, and disgraced your family."

"You wrong me much—disgrace there can be none. Be patient, and hear me."

Lord William had leaped out of his seat, and was walking up and down the room, pushing the chairs out of his way, in a state of high excitement.



"Patient! I *am* patient. Go on!"

"The lady in whom I am anxious to interest your lordship is accomplished and beautiful, and would dignify any station to which she might be called."

"Of course! She's a paragon,—spare your raptures and come to the point."

"Circumstanced as I am, I candidly acknowledge that I should have felt it my duty to struggle against the feeling she has inspired, were it not that—that—the union is highly desirable on prudential grounds."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to descend to particulars."

"Then, in plain words, uncle, the lady has a large fortune."

"A fortune. Who is she?"

"The youngest daughter of Mr. Rawlings, the member for Yarlton."

"The railway man? And you come to me to ask my advice. I'll give it you in one word——"

"Pause, my dear uncle, before you pronounce your verdict. Consider my situation. Mr. Rawlings has the command of enormous wealth; he is one of the richest commoners in England. I admit at once

that his origin is obscure, but I never heard a breath against his reputation; he is shrewd, clever, and practical. I have met people of the highest rank at his house. Reflect upon these circumstances, and do not decide hastily upon a measure involving my future happiness and success in public life."

"Have you done? Now listen to me. I have heard *you* patiently. The daughter of this railway jobber has a large fortune. Well? Granted. There are fifty as good baking at this moment in the smoke of Manchester or Liverpool, who would average you a hundred thousand pounds, and would walk barefoot up to London for the chance of becoming Lady Charles Eton. Do you hold your station so cheap as to sell yourself in such a market as that? Are there no women in the aristocracy whose alliance would bring you wealth and influence, that you must fling yourself away upon a—it chokes me to think of it. I tell you at once, that such a degradation would put an end to our intercourse for ever!"

"No—no—my dear uncle——"

"Don't call me your dear uncle. I have been your best friend—made you what you are—and this is the return I receive. My house is open to you—I was fool enough to make you my heir. I calcu-

lated proudly upon seeing the honour of our ancient house transmitted with credit to posterity through you. Dear uncle! I am no longer your uncle. What! marry the daughter of a railway gambler, picked up, probably, in the train, proposed for in a refreshment room, and the banns published at all the stations for the glorification of the chairman and directors. I shouldn't be half so outraged if you married a common girl out of the Opera."

"You must allow me to say that this is prejudice. See Mr. Rawlings, and judge for yourself."

"See him? Look here, sir," cried Lord William, seizing Lord Charles by the arm, and taking him round the room; "these are the portraits of some of the ancestors of our family. There is not a stain upon their lives. That is Reginald, who served before Rouen, and, covered with honourable wounds, was knighted on the field. That is my namesake, Sir William Eton, who held a garrison against the Parliament till they were reduced to live upon their horses, and then cut his way through the besiegers. This is the portrait of a Chancellor, who refused to sanction a tyrannical decree of the king's, and expiated his patriotism on the scaffold. You have heard their histories over and over again. You are familiar

with their glories—and now, sir, will you dare to stand in the midst of these worthies of your house, and disgrace the proud name you inherit by a disreputable marriage?”

“I will do nothing, my lord,” replied Lord Charles, “that I should not be justified in doing by the examples before me. I look round as proudly as your lordship on this gallery of worthies, and I see amongst them one who is distinguished above the rest as the founder of our house. In this picture, my lord—which I know your lordship treasures more than all the generals and judges in the family—we have a representation of the first interview between Marmaduke Eton and Grace Hunsdon.”

“M—m! There were no railways in those days!”

“I have heard your lordship tell that story a hundred times—I have seen your eyes glisten, and grow moist—you cannot deny it!—at the relation of that pastoral episode in the history of the Eton peerage.”

“Charles, that was five hundred years ago. The world has undergone some revolutions since that time.”

“I have heard you say that Marmaduke was the greatest hero of them all, because he had the courage

to lift a peasant girl he loved to his own rank, and to endure poverty and scorn and hardship for her sake——”

“Pish! What has this to do with it?”

“And I have heard you a hundred times declare that you were prouder of the poor peasant girl than of all the marchionesses, and countesses, and maids of honour, with whom the members of our family have intermarried from that day to the present.”

“Well—I admit it.”

“Uncle, if you honour Marmaduke for marrying the woman he loved, upon what principle of justice can you condemn me for imitating so illustrious a precedent?”

“Love? You didn’t say anything about love before!”

“You didn’t allow me time. But it is so, uncle. I love Margaret Rawlings.”

“Bah! The story of Grace Hunsdon is a legend of the old times. She was lovely, innocent—just as you see her there in that picture—they wrote ballads on her beauty—Marmaduke’s devotion to her was a touch of knightly romance that I honour him for—he married her for love—love, sir; she was a peasant, and hadn’t a farthing in the world. It was pure love.”

"But, surely, the accident of having a fortune——"

"Throws suspicion upon it. People will say you married her for her money."

"They will do me an injustice."

"I wish she was a beggar, I should like it better."

"I wish you knew her, and you would like her for her own sake. To be sure we are not in an age of romance, uncle; but the human heart is just as susceptible in the nineteenth century as it was in the fourteenth. Why shouldn't Margaret Rawlings shed as sweet a lustre on her station as Grace Hunsdon?"

"Answer me one question, Charles. Do you love this girl? Don't suffer yourself to be dazzled by her fortune, but answer me sincerely. Suppose she hadn't a penny, would you marry her?"

"Would you think a marriage under such circumstances prudent?"

"What business is it of yours what I should think? Young fellows in love don't care what anybody thinks."

"Then I answer at once—Yes."

"You would marry her without my consent—run,

away with her—and, like old Marmaduke, sacrifice everything for her?”

“It is a hard question, but I answer again—Yes.”

“Give me your hand, Charles. I didn’t think there was this sort of heroism in you. You would desert me for this girl? I don’t believe a word of it. You would come to me first, as you have done, and ask my consent—and you should have it. You could have run away with her if you pleased. Why didn’t you? There—if you love her, marry her: but I make one stipulation. I will receive your wife, but hold no intercourse with her family. A man may marry a woman if he loves her—but he is not bound to marry her father and mother, and a brood of low relations.”

“Your great kindness, my dear uncle——”

“You owe me no kindness. If you are resolved upon this business, let us talk of it again after dinner.”

And Lord William hurried off to his club, leaving his nephew to reflect upon the conquest of the first obstacle that lay in the path to the attainment of his object. The next step was to make a formal proposal to Mr. Rawlings, for which he had partly

prepared that gentleman by the note he had previously despatched to him.

When Lord Charles arrived at Park-lane, he found Mr. Rawlings waiting in his library to receive him. The interview was short, and conducted with the utmost frankness on both sides.

"My note of this morning," said Lord Charles, "in some measure anticipated the object of this visit."

"I fancy," replied Mr. Rawlings, smiling, "I am not wholly ignorant of your object; and beg you will speak unreservedly."

"Then I will be perfectly frank. From what you have seen of me, Mr. Rawlings, I trust I may lay some claim to your confidence."

"I know no man, Lord Charles, better entitled to the respect and confidence of his friends."

"I have a suit to urge that deeply affects my happiness, and this gratifying expression of your good opinion encourages me to hope for your sanction. I confess I approach the subject with hesitation; but as I believe my attentions to your daughter have not escaped observation——"

"I have observed them," said Mr. Rawlings.

"And as you did not discourage them, I flatter



myself that you will not disapprove of my desire to form an alliance with your family."

"Your candour, Lord Charles, would be ill-repaid by the slightest reserve on my part. I have for some time observed the marked distinction with which you have treated my daughter; and if I entertained any objection to it I should certainly have spoken to you on the subject. So far as my own feelings are concerned, therefore, I needn't say that I am prepared to give the most friendly consideration to any communication you have to make."

"You are very kind. The truth is, I feel that your daughter is worthy of a higher station than I can offer her. Younger sons, Mr. Rawlings, are not the favourites of fortune. I assure you I reflected upon this very seriously before I could make up my mind how to act. But the wisest amongst us are not always governed by their reason in such matters. Will you pardon me for speaking so plainly?"

"I consider your frankness highly creditable to you."

"My own fortune is small—but I have some expectations from my uncle; and I should not have presumed to propose for your daughter if I had not obtained his approval."

"Then you have already consulted Lord William?"

"He gave me his full consent this morning."

"You have acted prudently in making your uncle acquainted with your intention; for I freely acknowledge his assent removes the principal difficulty I should have felt in entertaining your proposal. As to fortune, we will talk of that more at leisure. It is disagreeable to mix up pecuniary arrangements with matters of feeling."

"In your hands I feel secure that everything will be done with a strict regard to the interests and happiness of all parties. In the mean time, I may be permitted to hope that——"

"We seem to have forgotten," said Mr. Rawlings, interrupting him, "that there is a third person concerned in this affair. My consent is all very well, but the lady—have you reason to think that the proposal will be acceptable to her?"

"I may, perhaps, deceive myself, but I believe she is not ignorant of my feelings, or indifferent to them."

"I cannot undertake to coerce my daughter's inclinations; let me assure you, however, that if I find her not indisposed to receive your addresses,

you shall have a warm advocate in her father. I do not know, for the present, what more I can say."

"I may consider myself then at liberty to speak to her?"

"No. That would be injudicious. I will take upon myself to communicate the honour you design for her. It will come with some weight and authority from me; and as I have never experienced from my dear girl a single act of disobedience—I think Lord Charles—I hope—indeed, I have very little doubt that I may promise you her consent."

With this satisfactory disposal of his daughter, Mr. Rawlings shook hands cordially with Lord Charles Eton, who took his leave, overflowing with delight at the result of the interview.

## **BOOK THE FOURTH.**

**STILL WATERS ARE THE DEEPEST.**



## BOOK THE FOURTH

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### CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE BARONESS DE POUDDRE-BLEU TAKES THE  
INITIATIVE.

BOUNDED on the north by Oxford-street, on the south by Piccadilly, on the west by Hyde Park, and on the east by Berkeley-square, lies the sequestered kingdom of Mayfair. Upon entering this region, you at once perceive that it is inhabited by a race whose peculiar characteristics distinguish them in a remarkable manner from the people who dwell beyond the frontiers. In its stillness and gloom it resembles the tranquil cloisters of some old monastic retreat standing silently in the midst of a populous town. The aristocratic repose of Mayfair attests the quality and mode of life of its denizens. The streets have hardly a stir in them, except when a leisurely

equipage wheels out of a neighbouring stable-lane, to take up its position at the door of some solemn mansion, or when the footfall of a lounging pedestrian awakens the lazy echoes, or the tramp of a few equestrians on their way to Rotten-row, breaks sharply on the ear. Here you are never disturbed by the bustle that pervades the surrounding districts; even the loud uproar of the tossing multitudes who, only a few streets off, smite the heavens with the thunder of eternal traffic, never penetrates to the heart of Mayfair. Here we have the most perfect image of that luxurious indolence which constitutes the exclusive charm of fashionable existence. The morning passes away like a dream in a slumberous dalliance with the mysteries of the toilette and the boudoir,—scarcely a single face is to be seen at the panes or on the flags, save an occasional lacquey, reading a newspaper at a hall-window, or standing with an air of pampered idleness at a half-opened door,—and it is not until night arrives, when some grand rout invokes the inhabitants out of their houses, and fills the quiet streets with long trains of carriages, lighted up, as they discharge their company, by sundry will-o'-the-wisps in the shape of link-men, that you can form any estimate of the population of the Sleepy Hollow of Mayfair.

Squeezed up amongst the large mansions, whose dark, tall windows looked so dim and grand with accumulated dust (a type of the stagnation of high life), are scattered many very small houses, which in any other part of the town would be considered close and inconvenient. But fashion sanctifies all inconveniences. Individuals who prefer a fine address in a dingy nook at the West End, to a free circulation of air and large rooms in any other quarter, have a clear right to indulge their taste. They have ample compensation for being choked upon a few yards of carpeting in the reflection that they breathe the same atmosphere with people of distinction, forgetting that lungs of less purity may breathe it also, making ominous gaps in the Red Book that show how strangely the aristocracy are sometimes shouldered in their own chosen seclusion.

In the drawing-room of one of these tiny houses, on a crisp morning in that season of the year when autumn is rapidly darkening and wheezing into winter, sat the Baroness de Poudre-bleu and the Hon. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke. The room was excruciatingly small, notwithstanding that the space was extended by the addition of the smaller back room which was thrown open upon it. A single



bay-window, with a balcony clouded by a verandah, kept the interior, however, in such a state of continual twilight that the dimensions were by no means apparent at first sight; and what with miniature loungers flung here and there, a few tall Elizabethan chairs with low velvet seats sprinkled about, and mirrors let in, up to the ceiling, on corners and interstitial panels, reproducing the furniture in imaginary recesses, everything was done that ingenuity could devise to give an artificial expansion to the apartment. It had, at all events, a very aristocratic air, small as it was, and the tone of its decorations, from the filigree branches on the walls to the Parisian *bijouterie* on the little sofa-table, was in the best, and, as far as form and colour could be trusted, in the most expensive taste.

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was what is called out of sorts. He had not been up late the night before,—he had not been indulging in any excesses,—he was too fastidious a liver, too *blasé*, to fall into any hurtful extremes. This sort of mental dyspepsia was constitutional and chronic with him; but on this occasion there was a special cause that aggravated its symptoms.

No intelligent reader, who has followed the course

of this history, will suspect that Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was in love. That young gentleman looked down from a sublime height of scepticism with prodigious contempt upon such puerilities. But he was in a much worse condition. He had made up his mind to marry Margaret Rawlings, and was surprised and perplexed beyond measure at the unaccountable difficulty he found in bringing her round to listen to him. Being under a strong impression that he was conferring a great honour and distinction upon her, and that the slightest intimation of his design ought to be gratefully received, he could not comprehend how it was that she persevered in treating him with an evasive politeness that baffled his attempts to ensnare her into a private interview. He laid many traps, but was always caught in them himself. In fact, he never had five minutes of uninterrupted conversation with her, and all the skill of the baroness had been wasted on idle stratagems to effect that object.

The baroness, with her infallible penetration, saw clearly how the case stood, and took her measures accordingly. The bewitching smiles she had bestowed upon Mr. Costigan were not without a special meaning. She saw that that gentleman was in the

confidence of Mr. Rawlings; and by securing a little influence over his susceptible nature, she calculated upon being able to extract some useful information from him. There was no difficulty in drawing him to her house. That was easily arranged, through the agency of Mr. Trainer; and Mr. Costigan, highly elated and agreeably perturbed by the notice she took of him, had already paid two or three morning visits to the charming little twilight drawing-room in Mayfair. We are all of us exposed to the suggestions of vanity when a beautiful woman shows us any particular marks of distinction; and Mr. Costigan had an inflammable temperament, which was quickly set on fire by such attentions. The prominent weaknesses of his character lay in the opposite directions of the social and the romantic, and both were brought to bear upon his intercourse with the baroness. The delusion of the morning was nourished so genially by liberal libations in taverns at night, that, after a few visits, Mr. Costigan was thrown into a condition which may be appropriately described as the *delirium tremens* of the tender passion.

The baroness succeeded in extracting from him some dim revelations which were enough for her purpose. She discovered that as yet Margaret was

free; and that, although Lord Charles Eton was encouraged by Mr. Rawlings, no positive move, as far as Costigan knew, had been made in that quarter. As to Henry Winston, her discernment had long since detected the hopelessness of his pretensions. Under these circumstances, and having a well-founded confidence in her superior tact, she resolved upon taking a decisive step without delay; and this step formed the subject of her present conversation with her son.

“I repeat, Bulkeley,” said the baroness, “that it is your own fault. Had you taken proper advantage of your opportunities, you might, by this time, have stood in a very different position with Margaret Rawlings. But you are so eaten up with languor and self-importance in the society of women, that one would actually suppose you expected the advances to come from them. How can you imagine any girl would have so little pride as to fall in love with a man who appears to be in love only with himself?”

“Haw!” drawled out the young man; “it’s very troublesome, let me tell you, to be eternally dancing after these little chits—they do expect such a con-

founded deal of attention. Can't be done, I assure you."

"And so, in consulting your own ease, you let a fine fortune slip through your hands. You manage yourself badly, Bulkeley; with your personal appearance, and continental education, you might secure the best match in England; but you don't know how to set about it. It's sheer nonsense to hope that Margaret Rawlings will throw herself at your feet. Can't you see that she is persecuted by lovers; and while you are humming and hawing, the chances are a hundred to one that somebody else will carry her off?"

"I don't think so," returned Mr. Smirke; "haven't the least apprehension of the kind."

"You're a fool, Bulkeley; and your overweening confidence will spoil everything. Now just attend to what I am saying to you: I have reason to know that Lord Charles Eton is your rival; as to Henry Winston, it is certain that Mr. Rawlings will never hear of *him*; but it is quite another affair with Lord Charles—a man of high connexions, position, and influence. If we do not intercept him at once, this project, which I have taken such pains to mature,

will be only so much precious time wasted, which neither you nor I can spare."

"My good lady," returned Bulkeley Smirke, stretching himself at full length upon a sofa, "where's the occasion to be in such a deuced hurry? I really cannot be hurried—so let the thing go on quietly. Lord Charles!—poor devil; the girl despises him—I can see that with half an eye."

"I shall lose all patience with you. Your cool indifference to our situation is not to be endured. I have endeavoured to make you understand, over and over again, that we cannot sustain our present expenditure; and that, in short, something must be done, or we must break up, and go back, to live as we can, amongst outcasts and *parvenus*. I rescued you, by my own unaided efforts, from that miserable course of life to which your father's folly and wickedness condemned us, and have run myself to the last extremity to keep you up in the best society; and yet I cannot get you out of your apathy and affectation. Now, here is a fortune waiting for you; and it might wait till Doomsday, if it depended on your exertions. You have been dangling about Margaret Rawlings for months and months, and, I

dare say, up to this hour you have not made the slightest impression on her."

"Haven't I, though? Ask her."

"I *have* asked her, and tested her in every way; and my conviction is, that she doesn't believe you mean anything serious. But it is too late now to talk about that. I am determined to take a decisive step this morning, that will bring the matter to issue, one way or the other."

The indolent young gentleman knew very well that when his mother had determined to take a decisive step, no influence which he possessed (or anybody else) could turn her aside. He had not seen her in such a mood for a considerable time. The sun had been shining on her, and the gay society in which she had been mixed up had drawn out the fascinating side of her character; but she had suddenly come to a full stop, and the latent energy and dark passions, which had slept all this time under the brilliant surface of daily excitements, were now called up into the fiercest activity. So long as she thought the affair likely to make a favourable progress, by constantly spurring the sluggish genius of her son, and filling Margaret's ears with praises of

him, she was willing to trust to time and circumstances rather than risk the result by any hasty measure; but the moment she discovered that there was imminent danger of a powerful interloper stepping in, and frustrating her long-cherished plans, she resolved to stake the whole game upon one desperate chance. When the baroness was worked up to this point of violent decision, it was notified to those who knew her well by the clenching of her vermilion lips with a downward spasm, which, while it lasted, utterly changed the expression of her face. There at this instant was the knitted mouth and the ominous curve. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke saw it plainly, and knew what it meant, and became as grave in an instant as if he had been lifted out of the drawing-room and dropped into the dock of the Old Bailey. There was no trifling with the purpose of that clenched mouth, so sweet and entrancing when it smiled, so bitter and menacing when it collapsed.

"I am quite willing," said the young gentleman, rather alarmed, "to do anything you suggest."

"I wish you had been willing to do it a little sooner," returned the baroness; "there is not an



hour to be lost. I have ordered the carriage at one o'clock to drive over to the Rawlingses."

"To-day! Why, what do you mean to do?"

"To make a proposal in your name for Margaret Rawlings?"

"You don't mean that?"

"I will do it. Don't put yourself out of the way to express your astonishment. Dress yourself, and be ready to come with me."

"I? You frighten me. Can't it be done without me?"

"Bulkeley," said the baroness, starting out of her chair, and throwing her head back with a look of stern reproof, "matters have come to this point between us, that I am determined to sacrifice myself no longer to your vanity and selfishness. Instead of availing yourself of your opportunities, you have thwarted and frustrated me at every turn. Now, mark my words. This is your last chance. If we fail to-day, through the contemptuous indifference with which you have treated Miss Rawlings, I have done with you, and for the future you must work your own way in the world. You are a fop and a fool; but, perhaps, when you find yourself a beggar,

you will think it necessary to make some exertion."

"Really you are too severe. I assure you I have done everything a gentleman can be expected to do in such a case. I follow the girl like a shadow, but she's always so engrossed, that—just consider my position; one naturally looks for a little consideration from people of their class."

"Yes—you *have* followed her like a shadow, without a tongue or brains in your head. Women don't like such shadows. Engrossed, indeed! Why do you allow her to be engrossed? Why don't you engross her yourself? And you must sneer, too, at their birth, and set up a position which you haven't a penny to support. One word more, sir; should this move break down, I will throw you on your father's family—who have never done me the honour to recognise me since the death of Colonel Smirke. We shall see what your position will do for you then."

"Positively, that's too bad. My father's family won't own me. I don't know one of them even by sight; and, considering that I am ready to do anything you wish——"

"You shall be put to the test. You shall go with

me to Park-lane, and I will ensure you for once that Margaret shall not be engrossed. When you are alone with her, make your declaration; and you may tell her that your future life depends upon the result, which will be no more than the truth. I will open the business to her father myself. It is a bold situation—I will do my part, and let me see that you do yours. Now don't fidget me by saying any more. It is half-past twelve."

"But suppose they shouldn't be at home?"

"I have already taken care of that by making an appointment. Do you think it likely I would trust such an affair to accident?"

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke knew it was fruitless to expostulate, and withdrew to make his toilette in a state of trepidation which strangely disturbed the balance of his frigid temperament. These young men who set up grand airs to young ladies are sometimes horribly frightened when they come suddenly face to face with a crisis of this kind. The meek, timid, gentle Margaret Rawlings, whom he had hitherto treated with such *hauteur*, now seemed the most formidable person in the world. He would rather have entered the cage of a hyena in the Zoological Gardens than have encountered her

on this occasion. But there was no help for it, and so he went through the process of dressing mechanically, and at one o'clock he was seated with the baroness in the carriage (of which he had a misgiving that he was soon to see the last) on their way to Park-lane.

It was a very dismal drive. Not a word was spoken by either of them. Here were a mother and her son going to make a proposal of marriage, plunged in a sullen reverie, and shutting up their sympathies from each other in a repulsive silence. What strange comedies, tragedies, and farces are acted in the pretty equipages we see moving through the streets, if we could only find them out; what flurried hearts beat under the smiling faces that look so brightly through the windows; what rankling antipathies are festering between the handsome pair that are lolling back with such apparent *abandon* on their way to a dinner-party or the Opera; what perjury is maturing itself in the disloyal thoughts of that beautiful woman who sits with such animated radiance by the side of her unsuspecting lord, from whose home she is laying the plan of an elopement to be decided before the night is over; what concealed stratagems, suppressed devotion, what fears,

hopes, joys, and miseries are enclosed in those painted vehicles which transport their freights of human emotion so pleasantly from street to street and from house to house! It is as well, perhaps, for our own comfort that we should be deceived by the surface of these gay appearances, and think that they are all as happy and careless as they look. What would become of our reliance on the close confidences in which we have garnered up our affections, if the perfidies that are scattered so thickly round us were to be laid bare to our gaze?

When they reached Park-lane, the vivacity of the baroness sparkled out as brilliantly as if nothing had happened, or was about to happen. The most acute observer of character could not have detected in her manner or her features the slightest trace of the anxiety that lay heavily upon her mind. She grasped Mrs. Rawlings by both hands, made the girls laugh with a sprightly anecdote of some *contretemps* that occurred at a rout the night before, and altogether was in so wonderful a flow of high spirits, that Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, who had a large experience of her consummate powers of acting, was rather appalled at the exhibition she made under such trying circumstances. For his part, he was fairly paralysed.

His tongue dried up, and he felt himself every now and then gulping an hysterical cough which wanted to come to his relief, but which he was afraid to encourage; and when he saw the baroness disengage Margaret from the others, and whisper to her at the window, his heart began to palpitate to an alarming degree. At length the awful moment arrived. With inimitable tact, the baroness contrived to want to look at something in Mrs. Rawlings' boudoir, and in a flash of gaiety carried her and Clara off. Bulkeley was left alone with Margaret. It was done in a moment. He didn't know how it was done. They seemed to have vanished in a mist, through which everything in the room swam and undulated in a delirious manner. While he is endeavouring to collect his scattered faculties, we will follow the baroness up-stairs.

Having got the ladies into the boudoir, she took care to keep them there long enough to give Bulkeley time to make his declaration. She was so prodigious a favourite with Mrs. Rawlings, that she had no difficulty in detaining her; but Clara, out of an instinctive desire to relieve Margaret from a *tête-à-tête* which she knew was not very agreeable to her, made two or three attempts to get away. She

might as well have saved herself the trouble; for every time she moved the baroness had something fresh to say which she was obliged to stay and listen to, and thus a full half-hour was consumed.

"I am really quite vexed with myself," said the baroness, looking at her watch with an air of consternation, "to think that I should sit chattering with you here, and keep Mr. Rawlings waiting for me all this time. You know I told you in my note I had something particular to talk to him about."

"Oh! yes," replied Clara; "papa is in his library expecting you; but, my dear baroness, he says that he can't stay very long, for he wants to go down to the House."

"You mustn't be jealous," cried the baroness, addressing Mrs. Rawlings with an ineffable smile; "it's only a little secret between Mr. Rawlings and me, my dear: you shall know all about it by-and-by. So, I'll run down to him—don't trouble yourselves—I know the room—I will come back to you presently, and perhaps have a discovery for you that will surprise you."

Then, leaving the ladies to wonder what it could all be about, she glided down the stairs, and making the softest, coquettish little tap imaginable at the

door of the library, was desired in a low, icy voice, to come in.

She found Mr. Rawlings alone. He handed her a chair rather ceremoniously. His manner was cold, almost freezing, and for an instant it had a refrigerating effect upon her spirits; but she rapidly brightened up, and, with a delicious tinge of confusion playing over her face, she opened her communication.

"I have been very anxious to have a little confidential conversation with you, Mr. Rawlings, and ventured to make my own appointment this morning. I hope——"

"I am at your service, baroness; pray go on."

"I needn't tell you that I have seen a good deal of society; and I must say, without the least flattery, that in the round of my tolerably wide circle of friends, there are none in whom I feel so deep an interest as your charming family. Indeed, if I dare give way to my feelings, I love those dear girls of yours just as much as if they were my own; they are so sincere, and affectionate, and well-principled. Ah! that is the great want of the present day. Our society is so artificial, so much upon the surface, that I really should be at a loss to find two young



ladies whose minds and morals have been so carefully trained."

"I am afraid such specimens are rather rare, baroness," returned Mr. Rawlings, drawing his right hand slowly over his chin.

"I am quite enthusiastic about them, and cite them wherever I go as models for all the young people of my acquaintance."

"They are much indebted to your good opinion," said Mr. Rawlings, gazing with a straight, inquiring look into the eyes of the baroness.

"Well—I hope you'll not be surprised at what I am going to say. Indeed, I suspect you anticipate my little secret—for it is a secret yet, I assure you; I haven't breathed it even to my dear Mrs. Rawlings, although we are as confidential as sisters;" and the baroness dipped her head with a playful smile, that might have furnished Mr. Rawlings with a fair excuse for suffering himself to be seduced on the instant from his severity. But he did not relax a muscle.

"You give me credit for more penetration than I possess," he quietly answered; "and if it will be any satisfaction to you, I promise not to be surprised at anything you say."

"Can you guess nothing?" and the smile played more bewitchingly than before.

"I have no talent for conundrums, particularly where ladies are concerned. Will you be good enough to explain yourself."

"I declare you men are terrible creatures, you do so force us to come to the point, instead of helping us a little, and we are such very shallow diplomatists. Well, then, the truth is, Mr. Rawlings, I am not the only person in the world that has fallen in love with your daughters."

"That I think very probable, baroness."

"And a certain young gentleman, who, from his position,—and don't accuse me of blind partiality if I add, his personal merits,—would be considered eligible in the best families, has formed an attachment for your younger daughter."

"Indeed!"

"Poor fellow! It preyed terribly on his health before I discovered it, and when I found out what was the matter with him, I thought the most prudent thing I could do was to have a little private conversation with you on the subject."

"I applaud your discretion. You have acted very properly."

"Oh! my dear sir, how could I act otherwise? My feelings and my principles naturally led me to consult you at once on a matter in which we are both so deeply concerned."

"Oh!—then we are both concerned in it?"

"Now, do you really pretend not to know who I mean?" said the baroness in her softest tone, throwing an angelical side look, full of banter and fascination, full upon Mr. Rawlings' face. Up to this point he had stood fire like a veteran; but this focal light was too much for him, and he could not repress a contraband smile that made its appearance round the corners of his mouth.

"How can I tell who you mean? Come, baroness, who is it?"

"Why, my Bulkeley, to be sure—the dear boy!"

"Mr. Bulkeley Smirke?" rejoined Mr. Rawlings, in an ambiguous voice which the baroness was much at a loss to interpret one way or the other.

"I am very much opposed, myself, to early marriages, Mr. Rawlings," observed the baroness; "and I dare say so are you."

"Well—I am; but we must be guided by circumstances in such cases."

"Exactly so—that's precisely what I feel in this

case; for I confess I am so interested in these young people, that I couldn't find it in my heart to throw any impediment in the way of their happiness."

"Very kind and considerate in you, baroness."

"I knew you would agree with me," exclaimed the baroness, in a livelier tone, clearing her voice, and confident of the issue; my boy, Mr. Rawlings, has been brought up under my own eyes, and, making all allowances for the affection of a mother, you may believe me when I assure you that he is very unlike the young men of the present day."

"I believe it," replied Mr. Rawlings.

"I am delighted that you think so. I can truly say that he has never given me a moment's uneasiness. Indeed, he is amiable to a fault; and, when we take his prospects into consideration, it is wonderful how free he is from pride or pretensions of any kind."

"Prospects?" inquired Mr. Rawlings.

"Don't you know that he is heir presumptive to the Huxley title and estates? Oh! yes—Lord Huxley has only one child, a weak, sickly boy—and, although I hope I am not so uncharitable as to wish such a thing, even for Bulkeley's sake, it would be next to a miracle if that boy should ever

come to be Lord Huxley. With such a prospect before him, what do you say, my dear Mr. Rawlings? Is there any reason why Bulkeley Smirke should not aspire to the hand of a young lady in whose heart he has created an interest?"

"None in the world, that I can see, baroness."

"What an excellent man you are, my dear, dear Mr. Rawlings. But I mustn't spoil you with my raptures. Poor Bulkeley! he will be out of his mind with joy when he hears how kindly you have spoken of him; and he is at this moment in a state, I have no doubt, of considerable agitation with our darling Margaret in the drawing-room."

"With Margaret in the drawing-room?"

"I left them together, very anxious, as you may suppose."

"Don't you think we had better send for him?"

"Oh! by all means—it is very good and thoughtful of you!"

Mr. Rawlings rang the bell, and desired a servant to request Mr. Bulkeley Smirke's presence in the library.

In a few minutes that young gentleman made his appearance, which fully justified his mother's description. He looked white with fear, and a cold

dew was distilling itself all over his body: he had much more the aspect of a culprit coming up for judgment, than of a lover fresh from an interview with his mistress. The fact was, that during the half-hour with Margaret, he had made so little progress towards a declaration, that the young lady at last saved him the trouble, and frankly told him that he might spare himself and her the pain of alluding to a topic so extremely distasteful to her. In short, she rejected him in unmistakeable terms, and he would have run out of the house at once, if the greater fear of his mother had not compelled him to abide the result of the negotiation which, to his horror, he knew was going on below stairs.

"Pray, take a chair, Mr. Smirke," said Mr. Rawlings.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Smirke, trying to rally, and drying his face with a white pocket-handkerchief; "it is intolerably hot to-day."

"The baroness has been letting me into a little secret, Mr. Smirke, which, I must say, has taken me rather by surprise."

"But you must first let me tell him how very, very kind you have been about it—the poor fellow is so agitated! You have no notion how kind Mr. Rawlings has been, Bulkeley,—but there now, go

on!" she added, coaxing Mr. Rawlings' forefinger, which happened to be resting on the table, with a gentle pressure of her hand,—“go on! I will not interrupt you again.”

“Well, you know I am a man of business,” continued Mr. Rawlings, “and you must allow me to be perfectly candid with you. I thought the best thing I could do, was to give you my answer at once, and spare you any unnecessary suspense.”

“So considerate of your feelings, Bulkeley!” observed the baroness.

“My answer is this—that I am sure my daughter must feel highly flattered, and all that; but I am sorry to say there is an insuperable obstacle in the way.”

“Mr. Rawlings!” exclaimed the baroness.

“I recommend you, therefore, as a friend, to think no more of my daughter; for I will not delude you by holding out the least expectation that I shall alter my present determination. In plain words, Mr. Smirke, I must decline the honour of your connexion, and distinctly request that you will not, under any circumstances, renew the proposal either to me or my daughter.”

At the conclusion of these words Mr. Rawlings rose from his chair—indeed, they all rose at the same moment, for the meeting was at an end.

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke cast a woful glance at his mother, in which reproach for this bitter humiliation struggled hard against his fear of the consequences with which she had threatened him. As for the baroness, she was wrought up to a pitch of indignation that showed itself in crimson on her forehead, and produced in perfection that clenched curve of the mouth in which was legibly written the fiery characters of scorn and resentment. But she controlled herself; for, enraged as she was by the annihilation of her project, she was too politic to quarrel with the Rawlings' family.

"Very well, Mr. Rawlings," she cried; "that is your answer. Of course it is a serious disappointment to my poor Bulkeley—of course—and, I think, you ought to have confided it to me, so that I might have broken it rather more gently to him. You certainly did not lead me to suppose that such was your decision. However, if you have other views for your daughter, I am sure I love the dear girl too well not to hope that she may find a husband who will make her as happy as—as—Bulkeley would have done. I wish you good morning, Mr. Rawlings."

"Good morning," returned Mr. Rawlings, seeing



them to the door, which he held open for them till they had passed into the hall.

The baroness did not run up to Mrs. Rawlings as she had promised, but hastened into her carriage, which conveyed the mother and son back to Mayfair in a condition of still greater exasperation and excitement than they had started in the morning.

## CHAPTER II.

SHOWING SOME OF THE ROCKS AND QUICKSANDS IN THE STREAM  
OF TRUE LOVE.

MR. RAWLINGS resumed his seat, and took up a newspaper that lay upon the table. But he didn't read a word of it. His thoughts were out on many excursions amongst the memories of past years and the projects of the time to come. He ran over the strange incidents that rose up like landmarks on his progress,—the deathbed secret of old Raggles, in which lay the germ of much of that prosperity which had since grown up so luxuriantly,—the solitary walk on the bright winter morning, when the fixed purpose of his life, which he had subsequently carried out with such inflexible perseverance, first took clear and full possession of him,—the triumph over the Dragonfelts, crowned by the recent apparition of Lord Valteline, who had come to him in a state of premature decay of mind and

body to raise fresh loans on his estates,—the pomp by which he was now surrounded,—the influence he wielded,—the alliance with Lord Charles,—and then the sudden contrast between all this wealth and power and the wretchedness and destitution of his boyhood, the squalor, suffering, and contumely through which he had worked his way, the companionships he had outstripped and left grovelling behind him, the associations he had formed, and the boundless visions of acquisition that yet lay floating before him. The rapidity with which the mind surveys and re-enacts the events of a lifetime is one of those psychological mysteries which may be set aside for inquiry with the phenomena of dreams, when the world shall have been broken up and man resolved into his spiritual elements. We have no clue to that electric association of ideas by which such a multitude of distinct images are called up all at once, or in a succession of bewildering velocity that baffles all speculation on the *modus operandi*. Certain it is, however, that in a few seconds of time a man lives over again the actions of many years; and that five minutes had not elapsed after the departure of the baroness, when Mr. Rawlings had completed the retrospect of his career and projected

its results far into the future. It was only the day before that he had accepted the proposal of Lord Charles Eton; and having now rejected Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, it was necessary to carry into execution without further delay the course he had resolved upon. He proceeded for that purpose to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Rawlings and her daughters.

Mr. Rawlings was not accustomed to use much ceremony in his communications with his family. Brevity was a habit with him. His occupations afforded him little time to waste upon words, and action was more consonant with his peremptory will. The exordium on this occasion was short as usual, grave as the matter was which he had to announce.

"You have seen Mr. Bulkeley Smirke this morning, Margaret?"

"I have, sir."

"He has made a proposal of marriage for you."

Margaret hung her head, and Mrs. Rawlings and Clara looked at each other in profound astonishment, for Margaret had been too much frightened to say a word to them about it.

"The baroness, it seems," continued Mr. Raw-

lings, "was of opinion that you favoured his addresses. Is that true?"

"No, sir. I never gave him the least encouragement."

"I thought so, and I have relieved you from his future importunities by dismissing him. You will not be troubled with him again."

A great load was taken off Margaret's heart; not that she could have supposed, if she had given herself time to reflect, that her father would have acted otherwise; but she had not reflected at all, and was oppressed by a vague terror that rendered her incapable of thinking clearly.

"My daughter," said Mr. Rawlings, "is not to be thrown away upon an empty coxcomb, who has not a single qualification to recommend him to any woman of sense. She must have a husband worthy of her." Here he took her hand, which shook violently, and went on: "come, don't be alarmed; I have something more agreeable to tell you."

"Sir!" gasped out Margaret. She knew as well as if he had spoken it what was coming. She saw it in the resolved yet not unkindly expression of his eyes.

"I have had another proposal for you."

"Another?"

"Not such a popinjay as Smirke, but a man of station and high character. Why do you tremble, child? Is it so dreadful that a man whose alliance would be considered an honour by any lady in England should propose for you?"

"No—sir—no—I am very grateful for his good opinion—but I never thought—indeed—I——"

"Well—well—of course you never thought about it; but you must think about it now. I need not tell you that I am proud of you and your sister, and that I have always looked forward to see you both well provided for. But this piece of good fortune—which you owe entirely to your own merits—exceeds my most sanguine expectations; and it will be the happiest hour of my life when you become the wife of Lord Charles Eton."

Margaret tottered, and grew deadly pale.

"My darling! What is it?" exclaimed Clara, throwing her arms round her; "there—there—love,—it is only a proposal after all, you know, and all papa asks you is to think about it. Papa, it is very wrong of you to be so abrupt with her. It is, indeed,—very wrong."

"Silence, Clara. Let Margaret answer for herself."

Margaret made a great effort to control her emotions, and flinging herself on her knees before her father, looked up beseechingly into his face.

"Dear papa—oh! forgive me—I have never disobeyed you—I know my duty—but this is not possible—I esteem and respect Lord Charles, indeed I do—but love him? No, no—you would not make me wretched——"

"Margaret," said Mr. Rawlings, raising her from the ground, "we will talk about this another time. Reflect upon what I have said to you. These foolish notions must not be allowed to interfere with your settlement in life. I expect that you will seriously consider this affair, and be prepared to receive Lord Charles Eton as your future husband. I have sanctioned his visits to this house as your accepted suitor."

"Before you had even spoken to Margaret about it?" demanded Clara.

"Clara, I desire you to be silent; and let me see that you interfere no further. Margaret must be governed by my advice; have a care how you estrange her from her duty."

"I have always tried to do my duty," murmured Margaret, Mrs. Rawlings standing behind her, and trying to soothe all parties by a low cry of "Hush! hush!"

"And you will still do your duty, Margaret. Look to me alone for guidance and protection; and the reward of your obedience shall be a position in society which in your childhood nobody could have anticipated for you. It is for this I have toiled and laboured, and sacrificed my own care and comfort to a life of incessant fatigue and anxiety. You will not disappoint me in the end—for it is my ambition as well as your own you will advance by this marriage. You ought to exult in it, child, and feel yourself very much flattered, and of course you will when you have thought more seriously about it. There, I will say no more to you now; but I expect that you will observe my wishes in the reception of Lord Charles Eton?"

Strengthening the last few words with a quiet look of parental authority, Mr. Rawlings left the room.

Throughout this little scene, Mrs. Rawlings had taken no part beyond that of betraying extreme uneasiness, and endeavouring to conciliate everybody



by deprecating excessive emotions on both sides. But now Mr. Rawlings was gone she thought it necessary to assume more active functions.

"My dear child," she said to Margaret, "what in the world could have thrown you into such a flutter. Why, my dear, it's a wonderful match. Think what everybody will say down at Yarlton when they hear that you have sprung up into Lady Eton? How Old Pogeey will stare; and won't the Winstons be astonished?"

"Don't talk to me, mamma!" said Margaret, whose two hands were clasped in Clara's, who was rubbing them very diligently as if the poor child were cold, although at that moment she had all the symptoms of a high fever.

Mrs. Rawlings could not understand Margaret's extraordinary sensibility on this matter. For her part she always sided with the strong and the wonderful, except when the romantic elements of her nature happened to seduce her the other way; but as she was entirely ignorant of the attachment between Margaret and Henry Winston, she could see no reason why Margaret, instead of being made miserable by his lordship's proposal, wasn't lifted up into an ecstasy by it. Now Clara was quite as igno-

rant of the attachment as her mamma, but her quick sympathy penetrated the mystery in an instant, and she saw clearly that this sudden emotion gushed out of some feeling which Margaret had hitherto hidden from her.

Mrs. Rawlings ran on with a provoking panegyric on Lord Charles, and Margaret listened to her in a sort of trance, while Clara, who did not hear one word of her mamma's well-meant rattle, kept her eyes fixed upon her sister, as if she were trying to read her thoughts.

"Don't say any more to me to-day, mamma," said Margaret. "I shall be better by-and-by. Dear mamma, you have always been so kind to me," and she leaned over and kissed her; "I know you will indulge me. I am a little nervous, that's all."

"The best thing you can do, my dear, is to come out and take a drive. The air will revive you."

"No—no—not to-day. Let me be quiet. I will go to my room. Will you come with me, Clara?"

Mrs. Rawlings good-naturedly gave up the point, and the sisters withdrew.

When they got into the room, Margaret looked at Clara for a moment, and flinging herself into her arms, burst into tears.

"Clara!" she exclaimed, "I am very wretched."

"Do not agitate yourself, darling," said Clara; "confide in me—tell me what it is—your own Clara, that loves you better than all the world."

"I know it, and it was that made me conceal my misery from you. I was afraid that your love for me might make you do something that would irritate papa, and I could not bear to be the cause of dissension between you. But you will promise me, my own, own Clara, for my sake, that you will restrain your feelings—papa is so severe."

"Well—there—you needn't be afraid. I'm sure papa will never force either of us to forget our duty to him. Sit down, now, and tell me everything."

"I never had a concealment from you before—never in my whole life. My heart was open to you—but I had a terrible fear upon me; and what I feared has happened. Dearest Clara—I know not how to tell you—but I cannot marry Lord Charles Eton."

"You do not like him?"

"I dare not deceive you. Oh! comfort me—comfort me, sister. I look up to you as to a being of a higher nature—strong and courageous, and true and sweet and affectionate in your strength. Where shall I look for consolation if you cannot give it

to me? To marry a man I do not love, and consign another to misery—no—no!”

“Another, Margaret? Then I was right in my conjecture.”

“You guessed it, dear Clara? I wonder you did not see it long ago. But Rose knows of it. I could not keep it from her, because——”

“I see it all, darling—I see it all. What a stupid creature I am to be so blind. And my poor Margaret has had this terrible secret shut up in her heart, and nobody to comfort her! We must see what can be done. Patience—patience, love, and all will be right yet.”

“What blessed words you speak to me! Your very voice is full of hope and encouragement, and I feel lighter and happier since this burden is off my heart. But, Clara—Clara—when I think of my father! What will he say to me?”

“Oh! he must be reasonable. Remember, dear Margaret, that he is ignorant of your attachment, and when he hears of it he will never be so barbarous as to sacrifice you. He must not—he shall not. Even if he refuses his consent to Henry—for of course it is Henry Winston—you know he cannot force you to marry Lord Charles. Cheer up, love—

the case is not so desperate as you imagine. But how did all this come about?"

"I hardly know. It grew upon me without my being conscious of it. I can give you no explanation, dear Clara, except that when I discovered the state of his feelings I became aware, for the first time, of the interest I felt in him. Circumstances brought it all out, and hurried us on. The visits of Lord Charles made him miserable, and he was losing his health and growing reckless about himself—and—and—what could I do? Rose thought it cruel in me to let him suffer in that way—and so, at last, I listened to him, and my heart betrayed itself—and, there now, you have the whole confession."

"But did you suspect that papa had any thought of Lord Charles?"

"Henry found it out by the strangest accident through Mr. Costigan. The discovery, of course, only made him the more urgent, and that was not the moment for me to retract."

"Retract? Why should you retract? We were all children together, and I love Henry Winston as if he were my own brother. It would not be worthy of my true-hearted Margaret to forsake the companion of her childhood for the best lord of them all.

Courage—courage—you have given your heart to Henry Winston, and he is deserving of it,—if any man is deserving of such a treasure;—you must not give your hand to Lord Charles.”

The conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door. Henry Winston was in the drawing-room. Margaret was too much agitated for an interview at that moment, and entreated Clara to break the dreadful news to him; but, after some little debate, she yielded to Clara’s persuasions, and they went down together.

Henry had a letter in his hand from Rose, who had left town the week before. And such a letter as it was, full of loving artifices and cogent arguments on behalf of him who presented it,—and such pictures of love in cottages, living on roses and honeysuckles,—and such protests against the hollowness and insincerity of a town life,—and such passionate petitions to Margaret to make up her mind, like a good, sweet girl as she was, and come down to the country to be married on the same day that Rose was to be married herself, although that happy day was still as remote and indefinite as ever! This revolutionary epistle, as luck would have it, came at a very unfortunate crisis, and, to mend the

matter, Henry happened to be in unusually high spirits, as if it were the destiny of love to have the poignancy of its little miseries enhanced by untoward accidents.

The valorous Clara opened the business.

"I know everything, Henry," she said; "so that you may speak freely before me. But I have something to tell you that I am afraid will make you very unhappy. You must bear it patiently, for Margaret's sake. If *you* give way, you cannot expect her to be able to sustain herself. Her reliance is upon you, and you must set her an example of fortitude."

"I will be patient, Clara. You may trust me—I am prepared to endure anything for her sake." His voice did not altogether bear out the heroism of this declaration, for it faltered very perceptibly.

Nobody has ever written a book upon the nervous system in connexion with love. We wish some eminent person would oblige us by undertaking the subject, and explaining the action of this particular passion in the production of the nervous phenomena by which its vicissitudes are marked,—such as growing white and red, hot and cold, all in a moment, stammering, trembling, and other visible tokens of a mysterious agitation roving over the

body, from head to foot; and throwing out symptoms which no other malady exhibits in the same variety or in the same manner. A treatise of this kind would have a considerable sale amongst the rising philosophers of our inquiring age.

Clara having, in the gentlest way she could, broken the sad intelligence to Henry, the unfortunate lover gave immediate proof that the preparations he had made for enduring the calamity were not so perfect as he had flattered himself. He flung himself upon a sofa, buried his head in his hands, swore he would shoot Lord Charles, and had recourse to many wild and incoherent expressions which greatly alarmed the ladies. Indeed, he did not show half as much courage and resolution as Margaret, who, crushed as she was by this overwhelming sorrow, bore it with a sweet and calm resignation that shamed his intemperance.

For our own parts, we have no faith in violence. It seldom strikes its object, and more frequently recoils and shatters the hand that launches it. What sight can be more piteous than that of a man dead at his own gun, killed by the recoil? Calm reason survives all turbulence of passion, and is steadfast in its course, and clear and firm, when violence has wasted its strength and is beaten down.



Clara endeavoured to make Henry Winston see that he would only involve himself in worse consequences by entering upon hostilities with Lord Charles, and succeeded at last in extracting a promise from him that, let what might happen, he would take no foolish step of that sort. He was very reluctant to give up the satisfaction of a terrible revenge, for he was impressed with a conviction that Lord Charles had acted perfidiously towards him, that he must have been aware of his attachment for Margaret, and that his first duty, as a man of honour, was to give way to the prior claims of his friend. If, therefore, he relinquished his design of shooting him, an act which he would have performed with immense pleasure, it was only to nurse his hatred with tenfold bitterness for some future day. In the midst of this exciting conversation, while Henry was yet flushed with fury and despair, the door of the drawing-room opened, and, to the undisguised consternation of the lovers and their *confidante*, Mr. Rawlings walked in.

He saw the real state of affairs at a glance. The whole story was palpably revealed in the red eyes and crimson checks of the delinquents. He had suspected it before, and his suspicions were now resolved into certainty.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he inquired.

There was no answer. Clara was going to say something very bold on the impulse of her impetuous feelings, but she was prudent enough to check herself.

"I speak to *you*, Mr. Winston," resumed Mr. Rawlings, laying a special emphasis on the formal appellation, which he had never used to him before. "Will you be good enough to explain the meaning of all this?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Henry; "nothing, sir—nothing."

"Young gentleman," returned Mr. Rawlings, with a freezing severity of tone, "when you were admitted as a visitor in this house, it never occurred to me to suspect that you would take advantage of our hospitality to abuse my confidence. You have deceived me."

"These are harsh words, Mr. Rawlings," said Henry, colouring up.

"I will not pick and choose my words for the sake of sparing your feelings. No language is too strong to express my opinion of your conduct."

"There is nothing, sir, in my conduct that I am

not ready to avow and justify," cried Henry, passionately.

"Henry!—Henry!" exclaimed Clara.

"Justify?" observed Mr. Rawlings; "by what right, sir, do you presume to step between me and my daughter?"

"What have I done, sir?"

"Quite enough to put an end to your intercourse with my family, Mr. Winston."

"Oh! papa," urged Clara, "do not be so cruel to poor Henry. Dear papa, that was spoken in anger. I'm sure you will recal it."

"Clara, if you value your sister's happiness, you will interfere no further. You have already busied yourself too much to-day in this matter. I ask you again, sir, what was the meaning of your alarm and agitation when I came into the room? What was the subject of your conversation? If your conduct be open and honourable, why don't you explain it."

Henry Winston looked at Margaret; but she averted her face, and their confusion became more and more apparent as Mr. Rawlings scrutinized them alternately.

"Your silence is a confession of guilt. You have been counselling my daughter to forget what is due to herself, and to violate her duty to me."

"You wrong me, sir. Margaret, shall I speak?"

"Yes, you had better, Henry," exclaimed Clara, seizing Margaret's hand, and standing firmly by her side. "Tell papa the truth. Courage, love," she added, turning to Margaret, "there is nothing to fear."

"Again?" said Mr. Rawlings, looking angrily at Clara.

"I acknowledge," said Henry Winston, "that your censure is just, if it be a crime in me to love one of whom I am every way so unworthy."

"Crime!" repeated Clara, with a slight expression of reproof.

"I hope you will make allowances, sir. I have known her all my life—how could I know her, sir, and not love her? It is quite true I have no pretensions to aspire to her now—but this feeling existed long before she was elevated so far above me. If I had millions it would be the same; I would cast them at her feet."

"Your conduct admits of no palliation," said Mr. Rawlings. "When you made this discovery of

your feelings, you were bound to ascertain whether her family would sanction your pretensions; but, instead of taking that honourable course, you meanly availed yourself of your intimacy here to promote your own selfish objects, at the cost, perhaps, of her happiness for life."

"Margaret, I appeal to you—speak one word for me. Selfish objects! This is cruel—I, who would sacrifice my life for her!"

"These fine speeches, Mr. Winston, are out of place in my presence, and I beg you will not repeat them. Are you so mad as to suppose that I should ever consent to such a thing—a boy, without resources, profession, or prospect. Of course you calculated on her fortune. The world gives me credit for being a rich man, and takes it for granted that my daughters will have great fortunes. Undeceive yourself. If she marries without my approbation, she will leave my house a beggar and an outcast. So put that expectation out of your head."

There was a dead pause; the young ladies standing apart, and Henry not knowing exactly what he ought to say or do. Finding that nobody spoke, Mr. Rawlings resumed.

"I have to desire that you will henceforth con-

sider my daughter an utter stranger. Let me have no more of this. I have other views for her, and am resolved that her prospects in life shall not be blighted by an union that would consign her to want and obscurity."

"Margaret—you hear that?"

"I cannot speak to you now, Henry," she cried, in a stifled voice.

"If you have anything to say, Margaret," interposed Mr. Rawlings, "you had better say it at once; for you are not very likely to see this gentleman again. You will thank me hereafter, Margaret, for what seems to you now an act of severity."

"Papa!" cried Clara, who, in spite of all admonitions, could not restrain her feelings, "how can you expect that she should say anything unkind to Henry Winston? He may have offended you, but he has done nothing to deserve unkindness from us."

"You will compel me, Clara, to curb this temper of yours. If Margaret has anything to say, let her speak. I can waste no more time with you."

"What should I say, sir?" inquired Margaret.

"That your hand is already engaged. Dismiss Mr. Winston as civilly as you please, but let him

know, from your own lips, that the acquaintance is terminated."

"Sister!" cried Margaret, turning imploringly to Clara, who merely bit her lip, with an expression of high resentment.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Rawlings.

Margaret paused for a moment, drew herself up with a great struggle, and exclaimed, in a low, broken tone, "I cannot say it."

The words were scarcely spoken, when Henry Winston rushed forward, and flung himself at Margaret's feet. He thought of nothing but her truth, and the trial to which she was exposed on his account.

"That one word has saved me! Only believe that I loved you for your own sake alone—that no mean thought ever sullied my devotion—and I am happy! You acquit me of that—I see you do. Thank you, and bless you!"

Having uttered these impassioned sentences with a fervour that took even Mr. Rawlings by surprise, and ended them by a shower of eager kisses on her hand, he started to his feet, and addressed himself to the obdurate father, who stood sternly gazing on the scene.

"You have desired me, sir, to leave your house. I am ready to obey you. But suffer me, before I go, to say that you have done me a grievous injustice. I should despise myself more heartily than you can do, were I guilty of the base design you charge me with. She knows how untrue it is. Poverty, sir, would be welcome to me with her."

A grim smile passed over Mr. Rawlings' face at these words.

"You talk like a child," he observed; "when you grow up to be a man, you will see and repent your folly. I suppose you have nothing more to say?"

"I wish, sir, to say, that if I have interested Miss Rawlings' feelings, I know my duty to her, and no consideration on earth shall ever induce me to abandon it. You may forbid me your house, sir; but, so long as her happiness is at stake, you can exact nothing more from me. I will leave it in no person's power hereafter to accuse me of duplicity."

"H—a—um!" rejoined Mr. Rawlings, fixing a penetrating glance upon Henry; "you have now, I presume, said everything you had to say?"

"Everything, sir."



“Then you will do me the favour to withdraw.”

Henry took up his hat, grasped Margaret and Clara by the hands, and, bowing to Mr. Rawlings, nearly stumbled over a chair in his hurry to get out of the room.

## CHAPTER III.

### SLIGHTLY ROMANTIC.

CHRISTMAS came in due course. Parliament was prorogued, and the fashionable world, like a covey of birds, into which a shot has been suddenly discharged, took wing and dispersed in a hundred different directions. London, notwithstanding, looked bustling enough—particularly in the neighbourhood of the poulterers' shops; but few people of mark remained in town, except people like Sir Peter Jinks, who may be considered perennial metropolitans, and who discharge their duties to the annual festival by gathering their families together at a great dinner on the 25th of December, and resuming their business punctually at ten o'clock on the morning of the 26th. The country appears to be understood on all hands to be the proper site for Christmas enjoyments. Everybody who can, goes

to the country at that season, and many who cannot, pretend to go for the sake of appearances. A paragraph in the *Morning Post* announced that the Baroness de Poudre-blue had left town to spend the Christmas in Berkshire; but some of her good-natured friends confidently asserted that she remained the whole time shut up in her nutshell in Mayfair.

Mr. Rawlings went into Norfolk, where he had recently purchased a princely estate, called Ravensdale. By an immediate change of scene, and a houseful of pleasant company, amongst the rest Lord Charles Eton, he hoped to dissipate Margaret's feelings, and reconcile her to his commands. He had never spoken to her on the subject after the dismissal of Henry Winston—silence being more oppressive and authoritative than the angriest remonstrances. He left the rest to time and Lord Charles, whose position was now favoured by the most auspicious opportunities.

There was a tranquil terrace at Ravensdale, looking down upon an extensive park, dotted and bounded by great forest trees; there were dreamy paths winding in and out of old woods, through which might be heard the slumberous murmurs of a

waterfall; picturesque ruins cast their shadows over a solitary belt of evergreens; and in the extreme distance the grey tower of an ancient church enhanced the quiet solemnity of the demesne. The place was wonderfully still. You could hear the branches cracking in the frosty air, and the low twitter of the birds that dropped in every now and then round and about the house, which was in the old baronial style, presenting an irregular outline of roofs, turrets, and chimneys, and broad masses of light and shade, that helped the imagination to a world of romantic suggestions. The scene was ill-chosen for the purpose contemplated by Mr. Rawlings. It is not in these pensive solitudes that the young bruised heart is likely to seek or find oblivion. The brooding silence, the loneliness and repose, only throw it back to feed upon its memories; and as the recent Christmases of which we are writing were not like the Christmases of old, buried in snow and sleet, and locked up in frost, but as mild and temperate as May, Margaret contrived as often as she could to escape into the woods, where, in that melancholy seclusion which lovers from time immemorial have shown such a predilection for, she might indulge her private reveries. The consequence

was, that she thought a great deal more about Henry Winston than she might have done had they been allowed to prosecute their love affair in their own way, so that the final effect of the separation was in reality to deepen and strengthen her attachment. Of all things in this world love is the most unmanageable. Parents and guardians are sadly foiled when they undertake to guide and coerce it: and the best thing they can do with it is to leave it to itself.

It is only justice to Lord Charles Eton to say that he soon discovered a certain reluctance in Margaret's manner which he had not anticipated, and that he acted towards her on all occasions with the most scrupulous delicacy. He carefully avoided trespassing upon her privacy, or pressing his attentions at unpropitious moments; and if any gentleman, under such untoward circumstances, could have succeeded in making a tender, or even a grateful impression on a heart that belonged to somebody else, Lord Charles must have accomplished that by no means impossible achievement. He certainly succeeded so far as to make her think very favourably of his generosity and magnanimity—a sentiment of respect which, occupying the region of reason, lies at the

antipodes of love; but whether the course he pursued was dictated by the noble motives she ascribed to him, or by a judicious policy founded upon his knowledge of human nature, we will not undertake to determine.

Clara had frequently thought of hazarding a bold step, and upon her own responsibility telling the whole truth to Lord Charles, and appealing at once to his chivalry and his pride; but day after day she was dissuaded from putting her desperate plan into execution by the gentlemanly consideration with which he treated her sister. If he had actually known the real state of her feelings (which we do not mean to say he did not), it would have been impossible for him to have acted with more kindness and indulgent reserve. Except by the gentleness of his voice, and that peculiar abstraction which makes a man look very subdued and poetical, as if he were sitting in the moonlight, nobody could have guessed that he was in love with Margaret; and until he actually avowed himself in some more direct and declaratory form, she felt that it would compromise her sister to talk to him on such a subject. She waited for him to begin, but, either by accident or design, he seemed determined never to give her the

opportunity. This went on so long, and so many dangerous moments were got over in safety, that at last she began to flatter herself Lord Charles would wear out and relinquish his suit.

But the expectation which was thus encouraged by his lordship's conduct, was daily shattered by the unchangeable aspect of Mr. Rawlings. As he sat at dinner, his eye was constantly fixed upon Margaret with a significance that admitted of no misunderstanding. At breakfast, or when they went out to ride, or in the drawing-room in the evening, that cold and menacing gaze ever and always haunted her. If a ray of hope chanced to find its way into her heart, a glance at her father banished it, and all was dark again. It was evident that, however Lord Charles might be disposed to temporise, Mr. Rawlings was resolved.

"My father will make me hate him," said Clara one day to Margaret, "for treating you with such harshness and tyranny. Never to speak one kind word to you, although he sees what you are suffering. Lord Charles is a thousand times more considerate—he is so quiet and gentlemanly. I often think that he suspects the real state of your feelings."

"I have sometimes fancied so, too," returned Margaret; "but his assiduities are so constant that I see no escape from them. I am afraid, Clara, papa is quite as harsh to you as he is to me."

"I can bear that," replied Clara, "without a murmur; but I never see him looking at you from under his eyelashes, and watching every motion, as if you had committed some crime, that I don't feel myself burning all over. I wish I were a man for your sake, Margaret."

Similar conversations took place every day; the mystery of Lord Charles's manner, which baffled their penetration, the unrelenting rigour of Mr. Rawlings, and dismal speculations on the future, supplying them with inexhaustible topics.

In the mean while the Christmas festivities were carried on at a magnificent rate; and the company assembled at Ravensdale entered into them in a spirit of high enjoyment, without the least suspicion of the domestic episode which filled more than one heart in that gay scene with care and anguish.

It now becomes necessary to turn from the chambers of Ravensdale to the servants' hall,—a violent transition for which we should consider ourselves bound to make an apology to our genteel readers, if



it were not indispensable to the unravelment of our narrative. As we find in the management of the most elegant establishments, that the luxury and high living maintained with such faultless taste on the surface, could not be kept up without the help of that servile machinery which performs its useful operations in the kitchen, the butler's pantry, the scullery, and the wine-cellar; so histories such as this, which record the ordinary transactions of life, must sometimes descend from the company in the drawing-room to humbler actors who, by odd accidents, occasionally influence from below the turn of events up-stairs.

The reader has probably forgotten the existence of Crikey Snaggs, who has made an insignificant figure on the Ladder, and cannot be supposed to be in any way concerned in the action of the family drama. If, therefore, we bring Crikey Snaggs once more upon the stage, conscious as we are of the obscure position he occupies in the *dramatis personæ*, the reader may be assured that we have good and sufficient reason for so doing.

We may at once confess that we have all along felt a private interest in Crikey Snaggs, from the first moment when he made his appearance chatter-

ing in the snow-storm at Mr. Peabody's door in Trafalgar-row, to this particular juncture when we find him matured into manhood, and considerably improved in mental culture and personal appearance under the fostering protection of Mr. Rawlings. We may be excused for this confession on the plea that poor Crikey was an orphan, labouring under a discouraging bodily disability, and because, working against adverse circumstances, he was faithfully devoted to the interests of his benefactor, and had consequently succeeded in advancing himself to a respectable post in the household. The great passion of his life was to evince his gratitude to Mr. Rawlings, to whom he owed everything he possessed in the world.

But this was not the only passion of which he was capable. Although not very felicitously shaped by nature for giving it house-room, he discovered that he had a heart like other men. He was led to this discovery by a series of experiments he had made from time to time upon the heart of a certain Caroline, who was lady's-maid to Margaret Rawlings. When he commenced these perilous operations, he had not the slightest notion of committing himself to any consequences beyond those of that illicit gal-

lantry with which town experiences had latterly rendered him familiar. He thought Caroline very pretty and very easy-natured; but he found her more fascinating and less pliable than he had expected. Men who trifle with women, believing themselves to be secure, will find out to their cost, sooner or later, that they are playing with edged tools. Crikey began in sport, and ended in earnest.

The short sojourn at Ravensdale brought out Crikey's heart in full flower. The country air had its usual effect upon him; for even individuals with as little refinement as poor Crikey are quite as susceptible, in their own way, to the influences of solitude as people of more cultivated tastes. And thus it was that, after indulging in many stolen interviews with the tantalizing Caroline, he surrendered himself up at last without any further struggle to the grave conviction that he was over head and ears in love.

It happened one evening in the dusk that Crikey was urging his suit in the recesses of that shrubbery of evergreens which clasped the heap of ruins already mentioned as one of the picturesque objects in the demesne of Ravensdale. The spot seemed to have

been made for lovers. It was completely shut in from view, and being tangled in the interior, and difficult of access, was seldom invaded by visitors. But although nobody could see into the shrubbery, in consequence of the density of the shade, those within could see out, and Crikey kept cautiously close enough to the walk which wound past his retreat to see any person who might chance to be approaching.

They had not been concealed very long when the silence and repose of the evening were disturbed by a slight sound which resembled a tread upon the gravel walk outside. Crikey, notwithstanding that he had suffered himself to be tempted into such contraband proceedings, had a very proper sense of what was due to appearances, and being resolved not to be detected in a situation so open to misinterpretation, he set himself at once to ascertain who it was, and to take measures, according to circumstances, for his escape.

Presently two voices were heard. But he could collect only broken words here and there.

“Return to town—then—all over——” said one.

“You must be patient—rely upon me,” said the other.

“Impossible—cannot live—I am desperate——”

“I promise you——”

The voices came nearer, and were now exactly opposite to where Crikey stood. Parting the branches gently with his hand, he saw two figures—a lady and a gentleman. Gazing intently upon them, and without turning his eyes from them, he beckoned Caroline to come to him.

“Look!” he whispered, “and be silent.”

Caroline peeped through the trees, and saw them. They were within two feet of her. What light was yet in the sky fell full upon them, and she distinctly recognised Margaret Rawlings and Henry Winston.

The dismissal of Henry Winston was known to the whole household; and Crikey, who was in Mr. Rawlings' confidence, knew more about it than any one else. Having clearly satisfied himself of their identity, he retreated back through the shrubbery, and making Caroline take one path, he made a circuit in another direction out upon the lawn, skirting it on the opposite side with rapid steps towards the house. As he reached the ascent to the terrace he looked back, and fancied he saw the outlines of two figures still standing in the deepening shadows of the wood.

## CHAPTER IV.

SHORT, BUT VERY MUCH TO THE PURPOSE.

How it was that Henry Winston came to be wandering about the grounds of Ravensdale, we need not stop to explain. The youngest of our readers—and we hope we have many in whom the bloom of the natural instincts is not yet dimmed or blotted out by the harsh experiences of life—can fill up that speculation without any help from us.

The claims of Henry Winston upon popular sympathy must be determined by his own actions. Circumstances had thrown him into an embarrassing position at a time of life when the judgment is unripe and passion has the ascendancy over reason. Having no occupation to give a fixed direction to his faculties, and having been brought up with an indulgence that pampered his desires and his will, it is not surprising that he should betray more im-

petuosity and headlong enthusiasm than older people may be disposed to approve. The wisest men when they fall in love cannot always regulate their conduct by the cool precepts which lookers-on are so ready to supply; and, in justification of the errors and absurdities incidental to the universal passion, we are bound to say that the world is singularly unjust and supercilious in its treatment of lovers in general. For instance, there is nothing excites so much laughter and ridicule as the reading of love-letters in a court of justice—as if such things were mere aberrations of mind, or comical evidences of shallowness and imbecility. This is all very fine and grand, and shows a stately superiority to the common weakness; yet of all that crowd of scoffers, from the judge to the crier, not one individual could be picked out who has not violated common sense himself exactly in the same way. People ought to be careful how they throw stones at lovers.

Henry Winston had perfectly satisfied his conscientious scruples in reference to Mr. Rawlings by the frank declaration he made to him at parting. For the rest, he considered himself bound, by the most sacred obligations, to risk all consequences for Margaret. No calculations of present danger or future

misery stood between him and the discharge of the duty which love and honour alike imposed upon him. Heads of families will reprobate him for seeking private interviews with the young lady, in direct contempt of her father's commands; but the junior members thereof will think that he was not so much to blame. It is not at this point, when the lady's affections have been won, and the happiness or wretchedness of her life depends on the courage and fidelity of her lover, that the moral question arises. It ought to have been taken into consideration long before.

The whole of that neighbourhood of Ravensdale, which enclosed the person of her he loved, was sacred ground to Henry Winston. Hurrying back from a dismal Christmas at home—the only dismal Christmas that happy family had ever passed, although none of them knew the reason why, except Rose,—he hastened into Norfolk, and loitered about the park at all hours, watching his opportunities to communicate with Margaret. We are afraid that in these stolen meetings, despair, and jealousy, and a wild conflict of fierce and tender emotions, may have led him to urge upon Margaret the imperative necessity of an elopement; but Margaret, so long as there was



a hope of any other solution of their difficulties, pleaded for time and patience, and endeavoured to persuade him that Lord Charles Eton had no serious intention of persevering with his suit. They were arguing this very point at the moment when Crikey Snaggs discovered them together—Henry putting a widely different construction on the conduct of his rival, and using a hundred ingenious arguments to prove that the moment she returned to London her father would insist on her submission to his wishes. They separated, with an engagement to meet the next day, and argue over again a matter which they had already exhausted in every possible, and some impossible, points of view.

The next day came, and Henry, impatient of the “lazy-footed hours,” was at the trysting-place long before his time. But no Margaret arrived: her place was supplied by Clara. The bad news she brought was despatched in a few flurried words; for she had a secret misgiving that there had been treachery somewhere; and that Henry’s presence in the neighbourhood was known to her father. This was only a surmise; but it was founded on circumstances so sudden and unexpected, as to admit of no other explanation. The evening before, Mr. Rawlings

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had desired Margaret to get ready to go with him to London; and he had taken his departure with her at an early hour that morning. Lord Charles was to follow the next day; and within the week the whole party was to be broken up. This was all Clara knew; but it was enough to inspire her with the most miserable apprehensions about her sister. She entreated Henry to act prudently; it was clear that the business had taken a very serious turn; and, arranging how he was to communicate with her when they returned to town, she left him, with a promise that she would herself apprise him of everything that went forward.

It was perfectly true, as Clara suspected, that Mr. Rawlings had heard of Henry's visits to the woods of Ravensdale. He had learned that fact from Crikey Snaggs. But she little imagined that her own footsteps had been vigilantly watched from the house, and that the same faithful pair of eyes and ears which had witnessed the last interview of the lovers were, at that moment, employed in discharging the same function with reference to herself.

The plot was now thickening on both sides; and the *imbroglio* deepened as the Rawlings' family, break-

ing up their holiday festivities, resumed their residence in Park-lane.

It was impossible to gather anything from the impenetrable manner of Mr. Rawlings. He preserved towards Margaret the same coldness that had marked his intercourse with her all throughout ; and Clara could plainly see that she, as well as her sister, had fallen under his suspicion and distrust. She was not very happily framed by nature for a conspirator ; she was too open, and earnest, and sunny. But the fear of committing any step that might further endanger her sister's happiness, or precipitate a crisis, which they both looked forward to with dread, made her act with a circumspection against which her spirit perpetually revolted. In this way she contrived to keep up a secret and confidential correspondence with Henry Winston ; and was the bearer of more than one treasonable communication between him and Margaret. All this was very wrong, but it was very sisterly, and forced upon her by the daily contemplation of that sorrowing face, whose smiles she would have gladly rekindled at the sacrifice of her life

The suspense of the lovers was not destined to

last very long. About a week or ten days after the return of the family to town, Mr. Rawlings was closeted a whole morning with Lord Charles. The nature of their conversation may be inferred from the sequel. That evening, Lord Charles, who had dined in Park-lane, taking an opportunity of placing himself, as usual, beside Margaret, formally, but with much tact, opened the subject about which he had hitherto observed so inexplicable a reserve. His tone was so soft, kind, and respectful, that she almost felt grateful to him; and when he came to an end, she was sufficiently collected to thank him for his good opinion, and to say that she must have time to consider; but with a hesitation which showed how little more he had to expect. He was too skilful a diplomatist to take so blank an answer; and he pressed her to give him some hope. Now Margaret was very timid and modest; but she was also very true-hearted; and possessed the latent courage which is always associated with truth. She felt how unjust it would be to encourage a hope she could not satisfy; and, even with the terror of her father's wrath impending over her, she resolved not to deceive Lord Charles on that point. She, therefore, told him frankly that it would be uncandid to desire him to hope, in the

present state of her feelings; assuring him, at the same time, that she was not insensible to the honour he designed her. Had she obeyed the impulse of her heart at that moment, she would have been more explicit; but the terror of consequences restrained her.

In the course of the evening her father spoke a few words to her apart.

"Lord Charles has made his offer to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have accepted him?"

"I told him that I would consider of it."

"What have you to consider?"

"It is so serious a step, sir—surely a little time——"

"A mere subterfuge. You think you are deceiving me, but you are only deceiving yourself. I am not in a position to trifle with Lord Charles Eton—I have given him my consent, and I command you to give him yours. It must be settled within a week."

"A week!"

"You now have my final determination."

The forlorn hope which Margaret had clung to with such tenacity vanished in these terrible words.

What was to be done? How was she to avoid the misery to which her father had peremptorily sentenced her? A week—only a week to think, to determine, to act! All that night long the sisters held counsel together, but could see no escape from the doom which now seemed inevitable. The only conclusion they arrived at was the necessity of communicating to Henry Winston what had occurred. Clara undertook this dangerous mission.

She was afraid to trust the explanation to a letter, lest his hot temper might commit him to some act of frenzy, and a meeting was accordingly arranged at one of the great shops where the ladies were in the habit of making purchases. Henry was prepared for the worst, and bore the intelligence with more fortitude than Clara expected. But she did not quite like the air of sternness with which he received it. All that wild and incoherent passion he had hitherto displayed seemed to have settled down into some dark determination. He asked her what Margaret intended to do?

“What can she do?” inquired Clara in return.

“It is life or death with me, Clara,” replied Henry; “there are but a few days before us.”

“What do you mean?”

"Let me see you to-morrow, here—or anywhere you please—and I will bring you a letter to deliver to her—it will contain my final request. Will you promise me?"

"I will—here—at one o'clock."

"Come alone."

"I will try."

This conference, which was held in a breathless under tone, was abruptly broken off by the appearance of Mrs. Rawlings, who had been left waiting at the door in the carriage. How far Mrs. Rawlings may have guessed what was going forward is open to conjecture. She had latterly shown unusual kindness to Margaret, and had talked very little to her about Lord Charles. Whatever her impressions or feelings may have been, it was evident that she considered it necessary to avoid implicating herself in the business, and that she was trying to hedge as well as she could between her sympathy for Margaret, and the implicit respect that was due to the wishes of Mr. Rawlings.

At one o'clock the next day, Clara took the risk of leaving the house alone and on foot, that she might have a better opportunity of hearing everything Henry Winston had to say.

He looked pale and haggard, and spoke in the nervous manner of a man who had wound himself up to stake all upon a single cast.

“Here is the letter, Clara, open. Read it, that I may know what you think of it, and what I am likely to expect.”

Clara hastily ran over the words of the letter, the closing sentences of which were blistered with tears, and heavily scored to make them emphatic. After depicting his agonies, and declaring that he could not survive her marriage with Lord Charles, he urged her to fly from the misery that awaited her, appointing a certain morning at nine o'clock, when he would have a carriage in readiness at Stanhope-gate to carry the plan into execution.

This appeared to Clara a very desperate proposal; yet, although they discussed it for more than an hour together, she could not bring any stronger argument against it than its obvious impropriety. What was that to a lover who reiterated over and over again that he would not outlive Margaret's refusal, which would not only destroy him, but embitter her own happiness for life?

Clara was so open and transparent in her actions, that it is not improbable she looked very guilty



when she was trying to do anything surreptitiously. She hid the letter in one of those mysterious recesses of her dress to which ladies sometimes confide their manuscript secrets; and when she got home, flew up-stairs precipitately to avoid observation. Unluckily, her flurried manner was noted by one who had good reason to suspect the office in which she had been employed.

At the second landing were the doors of Mr. Rawlings' chamber and dressing-room, the latter of which was partially open, and appeared to move slightly as she approached. Trivial as the incident was, it increased her trepidation, and she attempted to creep stealthily to the third landing. Just as she reached the door it opened wide, and her father stood before her, blocking up the passage. Without uttering a word, he seized her by the arm and drew her into the dressing-room, instantly locking the door on the inside.

She comprehended the terrors of her situation at once. But her love for her sister was stronger than any fears she could have on her own account, and she resolved, let her father deal with her as he might, that she would never reveal the secret with which she had been entrusted.

When Mr. Rawlings had locked the door, he turned sternly to her. "So!" he exclaimed, "you have joined in a plot to bring your sister to ruin and disgrace. I desire you this moment to confess everything you know, or prepare yourself for consequences that will pursue you with remorse and misery to the grave."

Clara, willing enough to take all consequences upon herself, if she could only avert them from Margaret, declared that she alone was to blame; that her sister's confidence was more sacred to her than life itself, and she implored of him not to require her to betray it.

"You may do as you please about your confidences," said Mr. Rawlings; "but you must answer to me strictly for your disobedience to my commands, in sanctioning private meetings between your sister and a person I had forbidden you both to hold any intercourse with; and not satisfied with that, you must carry letters between them. You see I am acquainted with your treachery, and no equivocation can screen you from my displeasure. But it may not yet be too late for you to make some atonement. I have reason to believe that at this moment you are conveying a letter from him to your sister—deliver it up to me instantly. I have

the power to compel it, and it is useless to attempt any evasion."

The tone in which this was spoken showed Clara clearly that her father was not in a mood to listen to appeals or explanations. Her alarm at finding that he was already acquainted with her secret came too suddenly upon her to be concealed; she was sufficiently self-possessed, however, to feel, that upon her conduct at this juncture depended the fate of her sister. There was only one escape—to secrete or destroy the letter.

"I will not deny, sir, that I have seen Henry Winston. I have never told you an untruth."

"He gave you a letter for Margaret?"

She made no reply, but attempted hastily to draw the letter from her dress. Mr. Rawlings observed the action, and, anticipating her purpose, grasped her hand, in which he found the fatal epistle crushed up.

The last struggle was over, and, giving herself up for lost, she sank into a chair.

Mr. Rawlings read the letter deliberately, and, standing opposite to her with a withering fierceness in his look that indicated some terrible resolution, he resumed.

"What punishment do you think you deserve for

abetting this atrocious scheme to draw down wretchedness and infamy on your sister? You deserve my eternal malediction! I will spare you on one condition—Swear to me, upon your knees, that you will never divulge the contents of this letter, or the conversation you had this day with the villain who wrote it, and that you will never hold any communication with him henceforth, directly or indirectly. Swear this to me on your knees, if you would not incur my curse.”

“Oh! sir,” cried Clara, falling on her knees before him, “that is a hard condition. I will try to submit to your will, but do not bind me to shut up my heart from my sister. If I were not to answer her when she questions me, where could she turn for consolation? Trust to my discretion, sir, and I will not abuse your mercy.”

“You refuse to submit to my commands? Then hear my resolution—from this hour you shall never see your sister again. I will separate you for ever.”

“Oh! God!” shrieked Clara, “revoke these words.”

“I have spoken them,” said Mr. Rawlings, “and I will abide by them. Reflect, therefore, upon the consequences of your refusal. You have outraged

the duty you owe to me and your mother, and you deserve that I should cast you out from the family you have done your best to disgrace. You now know my determination. Swear to keep the conditions I impose upon you, or you shall never again be permitted to see or speak to your sister."

"Sister!" exclaimed Clara, in a wild agony of terror; "for your sake, I swear! You will understand all, and pity the wretched Clara."

Mr. Rawlings made her repeat the conditions, word for word, and, having bound her to them by a solemn oath, folded up the letter, and putting it into his pocket, opened the door and left the room. In a few minutes Mrs. Rawlings rushed up-stairs in a state of terrible consternation, and when she reached the dressing-room found Clara stretched insensible on the floor.

## CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE ODDS ARE AGAINST THE FAVOURITE.

THERE was an interval of three clear days between the date of Henry Winston's letter to Margaret, and the morning proposed for the elopement. Throughout the whole of that interval, which seemed to him a century at least, he expected hourly to obtain some tidings from Clara; but he watched and waited in vain. In this tumultuous condition he fancied a hundred things, each new fancy driving out its predecessor as fast as his brains could fabricate one wild supposition after another. To say that he neither eat, nor drank, nor slept, nor sat still, nor performed any intelligible act for two consecutive minutes, would be a very inadequate way of conveying a notion of the bewildered state of his faculties. The fact was, he had utterly lost his balance, and, considering the desperate thoughts

that at times took possession of him, and the violent measures of relief he meditated from hour to hour, it was wonderful that he carried himself safely up to the morning when, considerably before the appointed time, he made his appearance at Stanhope-gate in a travelling-carriage, looking frightfully pale and ghastly—for, having had no intelligence up to this hour from Margaret, he approached the crisis of his fate with the most dismal forebodings.

We are afraid we must not give him the full credit of having controlled himself by any philosophy of his own during that racking interval. The merit was chiefly due to the prudent counsels of Mr. Costigan, who, seeing the forlorn condition to which the young man was reduced, volunteered the friendly office of keeping guard over him up to the last moment. From the instant Mr. Costigan had discovered his secret, he never lost sight of him; and, although he was not exactly the sort of person Henry Winston would have selected for a confidant, yet that unhappy young gentleman found much comfort in his company. The consolations of genuine sympathy are above all price. The mere babble of a heavy grief is ease to the wounded heart; and to do Mr. Costigan justice, the patience

with which he listened to Henry's incoherent talk, and the rough, strengthening advice he administered to him, were not without a soothing and salutary effect.

Mr. Costigan was in his element in a business of this nature, and had had so large an experience in similar affairs, that he considerably mitigated Henry Winston's grief, and fortified him for the ordeal that lay before him, by the narratives he related to him of the clandestine marriages, elopements, and duels he had assisted at in the course of his meteoric career. It was surprising, indeed, that he did not recommend his *protégé* to send a message to Lord Charles; but he wisely deprecated such a proceeding, not because he did not cordially approve of that mode of adjudication, but because, under existing circumstances, it would have placed his young friend in a false position, seeing that no direct *casus belli* had as yet arisen between him and his lordship. Mr. Costigan was a great stickler for certain rules to be observed on these occasions, which might all be summed up in two golden maxims,—the first of which was to put his opponent in the wrong, and the second, to keep him there. Could he have only got a hitch of any kind upon Lord Charles, he



would have had him out the next morning. As it was, he thought the most advisable course was to run away with Margaret, and, if necessary, to shoot his lordship afterwards.

Henry Winston occupied a lodging in Duke-street, St. James's, a couple of dingy little rooms, that might be said to be folded up into each other, on the second floor. Some college friend had recommended him to the house, which was a regular lodging-house—that is to say, an establishment rented off in apartments to single gentlemen, who let themselves out upon town all day, and let themselves in at night with latch-keys. This arrangement was a great convenience to Mrs. Stubbs, the respectable landlady, as it left her free to make a daily survey of the apartments, partly for the purpose of seeing that they were properly aired and attended to in the absence of their inmates, but chiefly as it enabled her to look after their little stocks of bachelor comforts, in the way of tea, brandy, and the like, which these heedless young men are so apt to neglect. Mrs. Stubbs took stock every day, and the necessity for this exercise of her motherly care was shown in the fact that, notwithstanding her vigilant inspection of the caddies and

cupboards of her lodgers, their contents diminished from day to day with alarming rapidity.

Mrs. Stubbs was a widow. Her husband had been a boxkeeper at one of the theatres, and many were the stories she used to relate of his extensive acquaintance amongst the aristocracy, and of the fine annual benefits he made, and the jocose sayings of the lords, and even of the ladies, with whom he was intimate in his professional capacity, mixed with green-room anecdotes and traditions of that palmy time of the stage when Mrs. Mountain was in her glory, and the Siddons ruled over the realms of tragedy. During Stubbs' lifetime she lived in clover, and was able to enjoy the luxury of a chaise; but since the death of that popular favourite she was thrown upon her own resources, which consisted of whatever profit she could make of the house in Duke-street. There was little to be made of a lodging-house in the mere matter of rent, taking all vicissitudes into consideration; and Mrs. Stubbs' principal dependency was upon the general department of "extras," in the management of which she displayed remarkable tact and activity. She had acquired from the lamented Stubbs an insight into the art of popularity, which she turned to practical account

amongst the waifs and strays who took up their occasional residence in her house, and who, being proverbially unskilled in the grocery concerns of human life, were peculiarly susceptible of the class of attentions she bestowed upon them. She was, indeed, all manner of woman to all manner of men; knew everybody's history, as far as she could glean it from visitors, servants, or the originals themselves; felt the deepest interest in the remote and unknown family connexions of her lodgers, and always had questions to ask after the health of relatives in the country, whose very existence was a problem to her; thus showing an amiable sympathy in their affairs, without betraying any invidious distinction between the first floor and the attics, but treating all alike with a proportionate measure of solicitude; and thus it was that she glided without difficulty into their financial disbursements, which, to her credit be it recorded, she considerably regulated according to the paying capabilities of the individual.

Now Mrs. Stubbs felt more than ordinary anxiety about Henry Winston. She saw from the beginning of her acquaintance with him the generous and unguarded points of his character, and how much he stood in want of such household services as she could

render him. He did not seem to have a great deal of money to throw away, but she discovered that what little he had he threw away with a thoughtlessness which called aloud for the controlling hand of such a friend as herself. Nor was she long at a loss to penetrate the secret of his abstraction and heedlessness; but there was little merit in her divination on this subject, for it did not require the acumen of so good a judge of young men's foibles to find that Henry Winston was steeped over head and ears in love. Having clearly satisfied herself as to that fact, her next object was to ascertain who the lady was, and this she hoped to extract from Mr. Costigan.

If Mr. Costigan had a weakness, it was whisky. That was the duct that ran direct to his heart. When he came of an evening, Mrs. Stubbs was always assiduous in seeing that there was a sufficient supply of alcohol for his use, and he was nothing loth to help her in contributing to swell that item in Henry Winston's bill of charges. But he had too magnificent a sense of the confidence involved in affairs of honour to let a clue to the mystery with which he was entrusted escape him. As he thought it a pity, however, to disappoint her altogether, considering how liberal she was of his friend's "mate-

rials;" and being of opinion, moreover, that it was desirable to baffle any inquiries that might be made at the lodgings after Henry Winston had got clear off with Margaret, it occurred to him that it would be a stroke of sound policy to throw out a few misleading hints that would put inquisitive people on a wrong scent, and at the same time appease Mrs. Stubbs' curiosity just as well as if he told her the exact facts of the case.

The evening before the appointed morning that was to make Henry Winston the happiest or the most miserable of men, Mr. Costigan was at his post in Duke-street, having been employed throughout the day in endeavouring to pick up some information in Park-lane, without being able to obtain the slightest intelligence, the ladies being shut up in their own rooms and denied to everybody. Henry Winston, who had buoyed himself to the last in the hope that before the day was out he should have some tidings from Margaret, gave way to a burst of despair upon learning the result of Costigan's mission; but Costigan, whose hopefulness generally ascended in proportion as circumstances looked more gloomy, drew the most cheerful omen from his failure. Wasn't it natural, he observed, that Margaret should refuse to see any one at a moment when she was making pre-

parations to leave her home, and throw herself into the arms of her lover? Was that a time to receive visitors? What did he think she shut herself up in her room for? Why, she was packing, to be sure! What else did he suppose she was doing? And if she didn't intend to be off with him, wouldn't she have written a line to him to say so? These, and many other arguments of much the same speculative cast, were resorted to with a fluctuating effect by Costigan, who, between scolding and soothing, left no means untried of calming the violent agitation of his friend. Henry thought there was some reason in this—but then why did not Clara contrive to send some communication to him? Why was she so cruel as to keep him in such suspense? He looked out of the window constantly for the postman, still thinking that a note would come to relieve him; and it was not till long after the last delivery was over, and the tramp of footsteps in the street began to lessen and give warning of the approach of night, that he relinquished that lingering hope. All the comfort that remained to him was, that if Margaret had determined not to accede to his proposal, she would at least have given him notice, and spared him the misery of so bitter a disappointment; she had too tender a heart

to inflict such agony upon him—she who was always so thoughtful of the feelings of others, so careful to avoid giving pain! But, perhaps, she was offended with him for proposing such a step—perhaps she considered it an outrage, an insult! He had never seen it in that light before, and now that it presented itself to him under so discouraging an aspect, his fears magnified its enormity. And thus, swayed backwards and forwards, between hope and despair, Henry Winston went through the most miserable evening he had ever passed in his life. He thought morning would never come.

All through these heavy hours, while Henry was pacing up and down the room, or stretching himself fiercely on a sofa, Mr. Costigan was luxuriating in an armchair, replenishing his tumbler from time to time, and trying to divert Henry's thoughts by sundry wild jokes and wilder remonstrances.

“ 'Pon my honour and conscience,” said Mr. Costigan, “ I'm ashamed of you. Pooh!—the back of my hand to you—I disown you entirely. Why, man, if any one was to take a perspective view of you now, growlin' and tossin' yourself about, they'd be mighty apt to think that, instead of goin' to be married, you were goin' to be hanged. Ah! then

maybe you are—but it's round an alabaster neck, you reprobate! Whoo! I wish I was in your place. By my honour, it isn't tearing my hair I'd be, but sittin' down quietly, and settlin' the particulars about to-morrow. I dare say, you've lost the memorandum I gave you?"

"No—I have it here."

"Well, just give us a rehearsal of it, to see if you remember what you're goin' to do."

"Oh! I have it by heart—post to Southampton—I know every spot where I am to change—arrive an hour before the start of the boat—cross to Jersey—then over to St. Malo. I know it all—but it's not that—it's not that."

"Then I wonder what it is, if it isn't that? You'll be whistlin' another tune this time to-morrow mornin', when I'll be throwin' an ould slipper after you, and singin' out,—

The Lord be with you! and a bottle of moss,  
And if you never come back it'll be no great loss!

Listen to me now. Ould Mother Stubbs is comin' up with the hot water; and as they'll be sure to be makin' tender inquiries after you when you're gone, we must put her on a false scent. Just go into the next room for a minute, and let me open the busi-



ness to her; and mind, whatever I say, you must swear to—or hold your tongue, may be that'll be better in the charmin' mood you're in. Here she is—be off with you."

Henry Winston went into the bedroom as Mrs. Stubbs made her appearance with a jug of boiling water, from the mouth of which the steam was issuing in voluminous clouds.

"More power to you, Mrs. Stubbs," exclaimed Costigan, brightening; "you're the woman for keepin' us in hot water; a practice, I believe, that's pretty universal amongst the sex in general, and small blame to them for that same."

"Ah! Mr. Costigan," returned Mrs. Stubbs, "you Irish gentlemen are always so pleasant—poor Stubbs was very fond of the Irish, and so am I. I'm sure I've every reason to speak well of them, although I'm afraid you're a set of gay deceivers—you are! *That* water boiled, Mr. Costigan, if ever water boiled in this world. Where's Mr. Winston!" she added, in a lower tone.

"There," said Costigan, pointing to the inner room—"packin'. He's off to-morrow!"

"I'm grieved to think it," cried the landlady; "I'll never see such a gentleman as him in my

house again—he was so easily pleased, and so good-natured and condescending. Well—I hope it's to better himself he's going."

"Hard to say, Mrs. Stubbs. I don't much like it myself; but then, I'm a little too ould to emigrate."

"Emigrate, Mr. Costigan? You don't mean to say that Mr. Winston is going to emigrate?"

"If you were to take a trip down to Liverpool to-morrow mornin'," continued Costigan, raising his voice, "you'd see him takin' his departure on an agricultural expedition to the backwoods of America."

"Well, of all places," cried Mrs. Stubbs, "that's the last I should have thought a gentleman like Mr. Winston would bury himself in. I'm quite shocked to hear it—I am indeed."

"Don't be shocked, Mrs. Stubbs. It's a tearin' speculation for a young man, and you musn't put him out of heart with it. But mind what I tell you—be careful what you say about it; because you see some of his friends want him to settle at home, only he has particular reasons of his own for going to America; and I dare say the Rawlingeses may be askin' affectionately after him—though, to be sure,

once he's gone he's gone, and it's no great matter what any one says or thinks after that."

"I'm sure I'd do anything in the world to oblige Mr. Winston; and if any body should ask——"

"Well, I wouldn't have you deceive them. What's the use of deceiving them? Just tell them that he took a short stick in his hand, and went to seek his fortune. Drink his health, Mrs. Stubbs, and may the devil blow the roof off the house he's not welcome in!"

Mrs. Stubbs, taking up the glass that Costigan filled out for her, went to the door of the bedroom, and, dropping a curtsy, pronounced her benediction upon the young man, who felt rather ashamed of the hoax in which he was a silent accomplice.

"Thank you—thank you, Mrs. Stubbs—but I'm very busy just now. I shall see you in the morning before I start."

Mrs. Stubbs was very uncomfortable at this intelligence. She suspected there was something more in it than Mr. Costigan thought proper to tell her, and she went away, privately making up her mind to watch every stir on the following morning, and ascertain whether Henry Winston was really going

to Liverpool. Her own opinion was that he was going to fight a duel, and she had some serious thoughts of giving a hint to the police. At all events, she would be on the alert. But Mr. Mick Costigan was too experienced a tactician to be outmanœuvred even by the wide-awake Mrs. Stubbs, and had already taken measures to secure his friend against the risk of being traced or followed.

The night wore on in much low and earnest talk about the business of the next day. Costigan gave Henry Winston some subtle advice as to how he should act on the road, and what he ought to do in the event of being pursued, or of meeting any person likely to recognise him. The contemplation of these possible dangers, and the necessity of providing against them beforehand, threw a colour of seriousness into the conversation that abated for the time the throbbing anxieties of the lover. The affair began to look real at last. The consummation or the wreck of his hopes was close at hand. Only a few hours now intervened till his fate should be known and accomplished. And all this talk about what he was going to do, and how it was to be done, gave it an air so practical and seductive, that his imagination

was easily ensnared by the prospect of a happy issue to his troubles.

Mr. Costigan having wrapped himself up in all the coats he could find in the room, and taken possession of the sofa, with the card-cloth for a counterpane, Henry Winston went to bed. But, under such circumstances, it is easier to go to bed than to go to sleep, and he lay very restlessly for a long time, turning from side to side, counting the quarters as they struck in the turret of St. James's Church, and listening, with a sort of infatuation, to the nasal trombone which was performing a singularly irregular obligato movement in the next room.

Margaret's face, sometimes looking very sad, and sometimes lighted up with gaiety, as it used to be in the happy hours of their childhood, flitted incessantly before him; and all the words she had spoken at different times came crowding back upon him, jumbled and confused; and he thought of many things that had happened, and went over old scenes, which he set in new frames, and animated with new actions and imaginary dialogues, more passionate and eloquent a hundred-fold than any he had ever uttered in her actual presence; and these memories, tricked

out with fanciful devices, steeped his senses in a chaos of speculations, under the influence of which his eyelids dropped, and, between waking and sleeping, with the half-consciousness which attends the slumber of love when it is fretted to the core by fears and misgivings, he fell into a dream of her who was the arbiter, for good or evil, of his whole life to come.

It was a dream, not of the past, but of the future. Lovers are always deluding themselves—even in their sleep! His head was so full of the morrow, that he started at once, full gallop, from Stanhope-gate into the regions of phantasy. Margaret was at her appointment, timid and frightened, and folded up in veils and shawls,—then, swifter than light, they were together, flying over roads and down green labyrinths, and away to the roaring waters, with many a tremulous touch of remorse and backward look of fear; then all was accomplished, and they were beyond the seas, and there was a sunny lake, clasped round by soft hills, green to the peaks with foliage, and the still sweet air dropped odours around them, as they gazed into the abysses of each other's eyes, and felt that tender and serene happiness which but once, and then for too brief a space, absorbs and melts our hearts in this world of stone and ashes. For a mo-

ment they stood on the margin of the lake as motionless as the shadows of the trees that lay aslant the transparent sunshine, and then Margaret's lips parted, and a voice rose upon Henry's ear—

“Holloa! man, you'll sleep your seven senses away. It's half-past seven; and you'd never forgive yourself if you were late!”

Henry started from his sleep, and, opening his eyes, saw the ungainly figure of Mr. Costigan leaning over him, and two brawny hands firmly placed upon his shoulders, in the act of shaking him with might and main. The ecstatic dream was over—the reality was before him in an instant. The process of the toilette was rapidly despatched—he had little time for reflection, and went through the form of breakfast more like a man who was still dreaming, than a lover on the *qui vive* for the most critical of all adventures in which a lover could be engaged.

During breakfast, Mr. Costigan had the discretion to trouble him with few observations, and the burden of them was to hurry and “not to keep the creature waiting.”

The room was in as great a litter as Henry Winston's faculties. He had wound himself up for one object, and neglected and forgotten everything else.

"Will you see to these things?" he said to Costigan; "I have thought of nothing. Where's the travelling-case? Hadn't I better send for a cab?"

"For Mrs. Stubbs to take the number, and track you like a hound? Now, isn't that a sensible idea of yours? My dear boy, you've put yourself in my hands, and it's the etiquette to act under my orders. Don't trouble yourself about the things. You'll find them at the railway-station at Southampton, directed to Thomas Joyce, Esq.,—mind the name,—you have it in the paper. You must walk out with the case under your arm—I'll take care you're not followed—and when you turn the corner, cross over, duck under a horse's head, pretend to take one cab, jump into another, and away with you as fast as the garron can pelt for the bare life to Prince's-street—drop out there, and run for your life to the livery-stable, where the carriage is waiting for you, and off to the woman that owns you, and may bad fortune and ould Rawlings be a day's march behind you for the rest of your life!"

Uncouthly as this speech rang upon his ears, Henry was affected by the pains his wild friend had taken to provide for all contingencies, and his eyes said as much as he silently squeezed his hand.



"Are you ready now?" demanded Costigan. "One partin' word before you go. You don't know much of the world, and your head isn't exactly just at present as clear as it ought to be. Keep yourself cool—don't touch sperits! I'm an ould fellow, and love, maybe, is all over with me; but I've known what love was in my day, and feel for you, my poor boy! My blessing go with you! Send for me if you want me, and it'll be a mighty big act of parliament that'll stop me from comin' to you. But mind what I tell you—keep your head cool—don't drink! A man flies to it in trouble; but drink only maddens the sorrow, and makes us as helpless as children. I know it well. Many and many's the time—no matter now. Who cares for Mick Costigan, or b'lieves that such an ould, half-cracked sinner has a heart in his body? Ah! my darlin' boy, we've all hearts, if we dare give way to them! Now, here's a little partin' gift for you to take with you—it's a charm against bad weather!—just whip 'em under your arm, and away with you!" handing him at the same time a small mahogany case, covered up in green cloth.

"What is it?" inquired Henry Winston.

Costigan quietly opened the case, and displayed a

pair of neat hair-trigger pistols, which had evidently seen considerable service. "They're ould travellers," he said, "and if they could spake, they'd tell you some quare stories. There now, not one word, but go. You'll be late, I tell you."

Henry Winston wished to say something, but Costigan hurried him out of the room, and would not even let him stop to say "Good-bye!" to Mrs. Stubbs, who, although she was watching his departure, was not in time to catch him, as Costigan pushed through the hall, and, rapidly closing the street-door after him, placed his back against it just as Mrs. Stubbs emerged from the parlour. Mrs. Stubbs was thrown into a great taking at this disappointment, and wanted to run out into the street to shake hands with her lodger at parting, but Costigan carried her back into the parlour very much against her will, and kept her there till his friend had ample time to effect his escape.

In the mean while Henry Winston acted strictly upon Costigan's stratagetic hints; and taking a cab in Piccadilly arrived in a few minutes at the livery-stable, where he found the travelling carriage in readiness to take him to his destination. At half-past eight o'clock he reached Stanhope-gate.

The morning was chill and dreary. A thick damp fog hung over the houses. Few people were astir, and, with his blinds carefully drawn down (which betrayed his inexperience in such affairs), Henry Winston watched with a kind of morbid interest the life that was awakening in the opposite houses, typified by the opening here and there of the curtains of the upper windows, and the occasional vision of a head peering through the glass at the dull clouds that hung over head.

He noted every face that passed by, and some of them turned to look at the carriage, which had rather a suspicious appearance in such a place at such an hour; and as the numbers gradually increased, curiosity increased in proportion, and even the policeman stopped, and seemed to examine the carriage with those peculiarly inquisitorial eyes to which a man who is employed in any secret transaction is apt to attach a very disagreeable meaning.

Every bonnet that came in sight was anxiously scrutinized, and once or twice, in the eagerness of treacherous expectation, Henry Winston jumped out of the carriage to run after some figure that he fancied bore a vague resemblance to Margaret, only to return depressed and disappointed.

Nine o'clock, half-past nine, and ten o'clock came and went, and the moving population was growing, and carriages were thickening in the road, and the flags were alive with foot-passengers. The individual scrutiny became more and more difficult. His terror now was lest he might miss her in the crowds that passed up and down, or lest, not seeing him at once, she might get frightened and go back again. While he was undergoing a martyrdom from these racking fears, an open carriage, which instantly attracted notice from the splendour of its appointments, approached at a leisurely pace the spot where he had taken up his position. At the first glance he fancied he knew the liveries; and we hope it will be no disparagement to his courage to say, that at that moment his heart fluttered as if it had wings and wanted to fly out. As the equipage drew nearer, all doubt upon the point vanished. It was Mr. Rawlings' carriage.

Henry Winston lifted up the corner of the blind to assure himself of the fact; and, as if that action had drawn the attention of the people in the carriage, the eyes of two of them were directed full upon him. The carriage passed within a few yards of him, and he could see them distinctly, although it was not so certain that they could recognise him, as he was

seated in shadow. He could hardly trust the evidence of his senses at a sight which blasted all his hopes, and turned his love into horror and despair. There were three persons in the carriage, Mr. Rawlings and Margaret, and opposite to them—Lord Charles Eton. Mr. Rawlings and Margaret looked straight at the blind which he held trembling in his hand; and he was close enough to them to see that, as they drove slowly past, there was a smile—could it be of derision or triumph? for he interpreted it both ways—upon Margaret's face!

He thrust his head wildly out of the window, but the carriage swept on, and in two or three minutes disappeared. Should he follow them, or remain where he was, and wait the issue? Perhaps, after all, Margaret was compelled to go out that morning, and would surely come to him as soon as she could escape; and, if he left the appointed place, he might lose her for ever. But then that smile, so sweet, so bitter, so indifferent, so heartless! Why did she smile? Was it to give him an assurance of her truth, or to show him how happy she was with his rival? And how did it happen that Lord Charles was with her at that early hour? And, above all, for what purpose did they drive in that

direction, past the very spot where she knew he was waiting for her? It was all dark and inexplicable to him, and the fierce conflict of feelings that at once bewildered and paralysed him, ended by fascinating him to the spot, where he yet hoped to see her again. It is hard to relinquish such a hope, and lovers in desperation will cling to the frailest chances, as drowning mariners are said to clutch at straws.

Hour after hour rolled away, and the busy traffic of the day lulled into evening—but Margaret Rawlings returned no more.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SISTERS.

PEOPLE who show an eagerness to condemn the conduct of others in situations in which they were never placed themselves, are apt to lay the flattering unction to their souls that they would have acted differently in similar circumstances. We are all wise and judicious and self-possessed *after the event*. And very virtuous are we who are out of the reach of temptation, and unscathed by the sore trials of the world. This is the virtue which looks out from its draperies and carpets upon the bleak wintry landscape, and hugs itself upon its solid comforts; the virtue of the coward who, secure from danger, boasts of his courage; of the shrew, who, after an unlovely and unsolicited youth, casts her scorn upon the blight of poor beset and suffering beauty; of the rich man, to whom want is an allegory, and who,

when he denounces the famishing wretch that has stolen a loaf, is quite confident that he would rather starve than do such a thing himself. Alas ! for all our self-reliance, none of us know what we should do till we are tried.

If our virtues were to be measured by the loudness of our protests against the vices, what an angelic world it would be ! But virtue is not the negation of evil, it is the practice of good ; and the most practical, and saving, and sweetest of all the virtues, is charity !

We do not desire to apply this test rigorously to the opinions which, according to temperament and circumstances, will be pronounced upon the conduct of Clara and Margaret—we apply it only in such a minor degree as the nature of the case may justify. Most readers will, probably, find satisfactory reasons for objecting to the course pursued by our heroines. Many young ladies would have shown more firmness ; if they had been Margaret, they would have refused Lord Charles point-blank, and abided the issue ; or they would have done something else, instead of temporising so weakly and timidly : and if they had been Clara, they would have died before they would have given up the



letter, or be scared into an oath of secrecy. We must here beg leave to observe, that we have not undertaken to portray perfect women, still less women whom we can hope to reconcile to the varying theories of ladies who criticise such dilemmas at a safe and tranquil distance from their agitation. We admit that Clara and Margaret might have displayed more heroism; although we are not so sure that every-day existence develops the heroic quality in sufficient abundance to warrant its adoption as a rule in such cases. Great faith, no doubt, may be placed in the prompt and sagacious instincts of women; but exigencies arise when instincts are confused and beaten down, and when all that armory of wit and skill, finesse, endurance, and high resolution, so potent on ordinary occasions, becomes useless and unavailable. Stern and obdurate strength is not the finest characteristic of women; they are most strong and most loveable in their weakness. In this aspect we discern their humanity, which brings them nearer to our sympathies; and even their errors and failures add a grace to our devotion by leaving something for our magnanimity to forgive.

Margaret Rawlings was placed in a struggle between Duty and Feeling. None can judge rightly

of the severity of that struggle except those who have passed through it themselves; nor can their judgment be fair and just, unless, like her, they are of a tender and gentle nature, sensitive, truthful, and patient. The mass of mankind are more taken by rough and vigorous features of character than by such qualities as these. The picturesque brigand of the stage, with a few brave clap-traps tacked on to his spangles, hits the fancy of the audience with a much lustier effect than the white-handed lover whom he despoils of his trembling mistress. In spite of his illicit proceedings, they like him better for the sake of his boldness. But we can't all be brigands. Some amongst us must be made of more delicate materials, or how should this mixed drama of life get on?

If Margaret hoped in time to harmonise the discordant elements by which she was surrounded, it was the inspiration, not of weakness or indecision, but of a deep conviction of the obligations imposed upon her on both sides. To reward her lover by the violation of her duty to her father, or to sacrifice her lover to her duty, appeared to her equally criminal; and any more direct course than that which she took must have inevitably led to one or other of these results. She put her trust in her own

truth, and kept the balance of her conflicting anxieties steady as long as she could.

In such a situation Clara might have exhibited more fire and energy; but she must have come to the same conclusion in the end, for she was governed by too strict a sense of what was due to parental authority to have actually outraged it. She would have dismissed Lord Charles *coûte qui coûte*, and stood upon her right to do it; but she would have gone no further; and if she couldn't have had the man she loved legitimately, she would have lived on in the pride of her heart, and died an old maid. As it was, she showed as much constancy and courage as circumstances demanded or permitted; and when at last, taken by surprise, overwhelmed with accusations that made the blood throb in her cheeks, and threatened with a vengeance which made her shudder, and which she knew that he who threatened it was too well capable of inflicting to its extremity, she sank under the trial—who shall say that, reduced to such a strait, crushed down by a malediction, having no time to think, no means of escape, no opportunity for destroying the evidence of a guilty complicity, they would have borne themselves erect through the ordeal?

From that hour a visible change passed over Clara's spirits. Her high temper had suffered a violent check; the sunshine of her gaiety was gone, and a heavy gloom had settled upon her life. Her lips were sealed against the sister she loved, whose sufferings she no longer possessed the power of consoling; and the grief which preyed upon her was rendered almost intolerable by her own self-accusations and poignant remorse.

In vain Margaret questioned her when they met about Henry Winston. Wild with terror, Clara clung to her, and implored her not to ask what had happened.

"Spare me!" she cried, flinging herself at Margaret's feet, and looking up at her with an expression of despair in her eyes; "you will break my heart if you speak to me about him. I can tell you nothing, Margaret—nothing, nothing! Believe in everything that is good, and true, and right—hope for the best—hope always, always! But spare me, my sister—do not ask me any questions!"

"Clara, my own true sister—I will believe anything, everything, but that you would forsake me. Speak to me, Clara—one word, one little word of comfort!"

“God of mercy! pity me, and show me some way to relieve this poor child of her great misery! Margaret—I will devote my whole life to you—it is the least my love for you can do. We shall be together to help and strengthen each other—that will be something—to me it will be all the happiness I can hope for in this world. There—be comforted—your own Clara will never forsake you.”

“Dear Clara, be calm—be calm! What is all this terrible emotion? Will you not tell me what has happened? Henry—what is it? What has he done?”

“Nothing—nothing—he has done nothing.”

“Have you seen him?”

“I cannot answer you. I implore you to spare me, and ask me no questions.”

“O Clara! into what an abyss of wretchedness you plunge me. This suspense is worse than death. I would rather you would tell me the worst—I could bear anything better than this. Where is he? What does he say?”

“Margaret—I have nothing to tell you. Don’t augur ill from that. If you knew all, Margaret,—if you could look into my heart at this moment—you would see what I am suffering, and have com-

passion upon me. Let us say no more about it now."

"Cruel—cruel!"

"It is not I that am cruel, my own Margaret. Oh! no—you do not believe that I would willingly inflict a pang upon you—I would suffer it myself a thousand times rather. You believe that—you know it—you know how tenderly I love you; and I only ask you now to confide in my love—it is not much, after all the proofs we have given each other——" she could not finish the sentence, her voice was choked, and she threw herself into Margaret's arms.

"My true-hearted, noble Clara, I will show you that I confide in you. I am silent. I will try to give you no more pain. I will pray for strength and patience. You shall see how patient I can be." And Margaret sobbed aloud as she pressed her sister to her heart.

Two days passed away, and the resolution was kept in words. But it was evident what direction their thoughts took, and how their harassed spirits hovered over the forbidden topic. Margaret tried to glean some information from her mother, and watched every look and action of Mr. Rawlings, in

the hope of extracting a clue to the mystery; but all in vain. The darkness in which she was involved only thickened round her.

On the second day Lord Charles Eton dined at Park-lane. There was a small party to meet him; and everybody at table apparently seemed to understand that his lordship and Margaret were engaged. This inference might be gathered from the tone in which they spoke to her, and the peculiar manner of Lord Charles, and, especially, from the pointed remarks of Mr. Rawlings, who obviously desired to make that impression upon his guests. The position in which she was thus placed for the first time, the inexplicable reserve of Clara, and the unaccountable conduct of Henry Winston, whose silence was now beginning to give her a new feeling of uneasiness, made Margaret strangely nervous. She began to feel herself deserted and unprotected. Then—and never until then—a sensation of pride (which always springs to a woman's rescue, sometimes before it is wanted, and never comes to the help of the other sex!) took possession of her. Had Henry Winston faltered in his faith? This was a dangerous question—it came upon her suddenly and involuntarily, she did not seek it, and would have given worlds

that it had never crossed her thoughts. Happy for her if it had not!

In the evening Lord Charles was unusually brilliant. His character in society generally was that of a man who shone in a *tête-à-tête*, or in a conversational group; but on this occasion he was universal in his lustre. He seemed to Margaret to have the air of a conqueror; and, worse than that, he wore his laurels so becomingly, with so much grace and ease, and was so thoroughly kind and gentlemanly, that, deeply as she resented the confession to her own heart, she could not help admitting that his bearing was faultless. But what had become of Henry Winston all this time? Why should he leave her in such a state of doubt and distraction? Why give such a triumph to his rival? A hundred such inquiries found no answer but in the woman's pride that resisted the first approach of the humiliating suspicion.

The conversation happened to turn upon a villa Lord Charles had been looking at in the Regent's Park, the style and decorations of which he described with the *gusto* of a connoisseur. Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings had been talking of it before, and had agreed to visit it together. Mr. Rawlings pro-



posed that they should go the next morning, and, having many engagements through the day, he suggested the early hour of nine o'clock, to which his lordship assented. Margaret took very little interest in the subject, although she was frequently appealed to for her opinion, and was not a little surprised when her father told her that it was his intention to take her with them.

“At nine o'clock, sir?”

“Nine o'clock!” exclaimed Clara, thrown off her guard, and turning deadly pale.

Mr. Rawlings looked sternly at Clara, who instantly left her seat and went to another part of the room.

If Margaret had been conscious of the design which this early excursion concealed, she would have risked the worst rather than have gone. But she had no suspicion of any purpose beyond that of driving her out with Lord Charles; and, having no reasonable excuse for refusing, she was forced to consent.

That night was to Clara a night of sleepless anguish. She saw that her father meditated something in reference to Henry Winston, and her head swam with the wildest conjectures. Nine o'clock

was the hour appointed for the meeting at Stanhope-gate, and her father, acquainted with the rendezvous, was going to take Margaret out at that very hour with Lord Charles Eton. Did he contemplate any violence to Henry? She alone was the depositary of the secret, and she alone could save him. But by what means? It was impossible to communicate with him in time, even if she were not bound to silence by a solemn obligation. But could she prevent Margaret from going? How to do it without awakening her suspicions, and reviving her fears in a worse form than ever? And while Clara was suffering all this torture, Margaret had fallen into a gentle sleep, which, for a few hours, was shedding its oblivion over her griefs.

When morning came, Clara tried to persuade Margaret that she had a headache—she was sure she had a headache. But Margaret was resolved to rally herself for Clara's sake, and by way of showing that she was keeping her promise to be patient, she declared that she had had a refreshing sleep, and was quite well. As a last resource, Clara said she would accompany her, but a glance from Mr. Rawlings put an end to that device; and so Margaret

went without her, and left Clara behind more wretched than she was herself.

Mr. Rawlings' object was to show Henry Winston that his scheme was defeated, and to make Margaret an unconscious agent in the mortification and contumely he desired to inflict upon him. The stratagem succeeded to perfection. As they swept past the travelling-carriage, which occupied a conspicuous position, drawn up at the kerb-stone, with its blinds down, Mr. Rawlings directed Margaret's attention to it with a dry pleasantry of manner that made her smile, either out of complaisance or indifference, little suspecting that that smile, which used to carry such joy to the heart of Henry Winston, now fell upon it like a bolt of ice!

Happy Clara, when Margaret returned safely home without a word of adventure to relate to her! But she asked no questions, and did not even know that Margaret had seen the carriage that had been prepared for her elopement.

## CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH WE MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE UNEXPECTEDLY.

WE left Mr. Costigan shut up with Mrs. Stubbs in the little parlour in Duke-street, much to the good woman's vexation. Like the Irishman who captured three Spaniards in the Peninsular war, he fairly "surrounded" her; and when he got her into the parlour, he took care that she shouldn't get out again till it was too late to do any mischief; improving the opportunity by supplying her with exactly the kind of dark inuendoes which suited his purpose, and which he knew she would lick into shape and retail to the utmost advantage. We should be doing injustice to Mrs. Stubbs if we omitted to add that she listened to him with profound attention, and showed as much interest in the affairs of Henry Winston as if he had been her own

son, instead of a stranger and bird-of-passage, whom she never expected to see again.

Having completed this essential part of his morning's work, Mr. Costigan proceeded to the vacated chambers of his friend, and, collecting his disordered reliques, jumbled them together in a large trunk, which he covered with a linen case, the key being sealed up in a note inside, and, attaching a label to the top, directed, in a straggling, shaky hand, to "Thomas Joyce, Esq., Station, Southampton, to be kept till called for," he ordered a cab, and drove off to London Bridge, to discharge the last act his warm zeal had undertaken. That duty concluded, he turned his face towards the city, and in ten minutes was bustling his way through a dense crowd in front of Capel-court, where we must drop the curtain upon him for the present.

Mrs. Stubbs was tolerably fortunate, upon the average, with her lodgings. In the season she was generally pretty full; and out of the season she was seldom quite empty; so that upon the whole, to use her own modest phrase, she had no reason to complain. Upon this occasion her usual luck did not desert her. Few days had elapsed after the departure of Henry Winston, when a tall old gentle-

man, accompanied by a lumbering young man, attracted by the bill in the window, asked to look at the apartments. It was in the dusk of the evening, and Mrs. Stubbs was not able to satisfy herself accurately what manner of man the new comer was; but a candle speedily assisted her to a survey of his personal appearance, revealing one of the strangest figures she had ever set her eyes upon. The old man was considerably above the ordinary height, and very gaunt, with a great head and shoulders, and long arms and legs. His heavy, bony face, dark and deeply indented about the mouth, with grey bushy eyebrows, had rather a repulsive, or, at least, a startling expression at the first glance; but this was probably owing to a huge pair of green spectacles, which straddled his nose so conspicuously as to suggest to Mrs. Stubbs an uncomfortable notion that he wore them for the purpose of disguise. His dress was equally remarkable and no less equivocal—a loose coat with great pockets, a monstrous pair of trousers with a broad stripe down the sides, flapping over a prodigious pair of dirty boots, an old black handkerchief winding in a narrow stream round his neck, the whole apparel being much the worse for the wear. Yet for all this uncouthness, his voice was soft, and his

manner quiet almost to sadness, and, after five minutes' conversation, Mrs. Stubbs began to waver in her judgment. The stranger spoke broken English, and the worthy landlady took it for granted that he was a foreigner—a conjecture in which she was confirmed by the costume and aspect of the young man whom he called his "boy," and who, in much the same style of tailoring, was still more *outré* than the old gentleman.

Henry Winston's late apartments were duly inspected, Mrs. Stubbs keeping her eyes fixed all the time upon the strangers, out of a prudent regard for such little portable articles as happened to be within reach. This done, they all descended together to the parlour to discuss the question of terms.

"Your *appartement*, madame, is very well," said the old gentleman; "it is very good for me and my boy—we do not want much, madame——"

"Attendance, I suppose?" inquired Mrs. Stubbs.

"Attendance?"

"You breakfast at home?"

"Breakfast? oh! yes—certainly."

"We do not generally undertake to cook dinners; if a lodger is ill, or anything particular, I wouldn't

object, of course, to a plain joint—but if you dined at home, you understand, it would make a difference.”

“Yes, I understand—certainly, we dine at a *restaurant* always. What charge do you make, madame?”

“Well, the lowest farthing is thirty shillings a week.”

“Thirty shilling! oh! *c'est trop cher!*”

“I don't know about that,” returned Mrs. Stubbs, “but it is the cheapest lodging in London.”

“Cheap? no—no—madame. I think it is very much. Thirty shilling for me and my *pauvre petit!*”

“What did you expect to get it for, sir?”

“*Eh! bien*—if I could see my friend, Mr. Rawling, I should not want money; but you understand, madame, I am not rich. I come to London to see my friend, my good friend Mr. Rawling—can you tell me, madame, where I can see Mr. Rawling? He is my very good friend.”

“Mr. Rawlings?” exclaimed Mrs. Stubbs, with an air of unaffected wonder, connecting this strange visitor in some confused way in her mind



with the mystery that hung over her departed lodger. "Mr. Rawlings? Do you mean the great railway Rawlings?"

"Oh! yes—certainly—he is my good friend."

"No—sure! Mr. Rawlings your friend—then, perhaps, you know Mr. Henry Winston?"

"Winston? Winston? no—don't know Mr. Winston."

"Curious, and Mr. Rawlings so great a friend of yours."

"Ah! it is long time since I see Mr. Rawling, and Madame Rawling—ah! long time—I was a strong man then. I had my house and my *affaires*, and everything I want; but since then, madame, a great change has come at me. I am no more *agent*—*les Anglais* go, one upon the other. Yes, all gone, and leave me alone with *mon pauvre petit*—certainly, we are poor now; but if I could see my good friend, Mr. Rawling, he would do for me."

Mrs. Stubbs was slow to believe in the amiable side of humanity—she had had too much experience the other way; but the simplicity and guilelessness of this poor gentleman were irresistible. His attachment to his "boy," who sat looking on with a stupid face without uttering a word, somehow inte-

rested her, and, calculating upon opening a communication through his means with Mr. Rawlings, and, perhaps, establishing herself in the favour of that influential personage by revealing the information she had obtained from Costigan, she resolved to take her new acquaintance into the house upon the best terms she could get from him. A week or two, at all events, "couldn't hurt," she thought, and there was a chance of making a friend for life of the wealthy Mr. Rawlings.

In this complying view of the conditions, the treaty was soon agreed upon between the high contracting powers, and Mr. Sloake—for it was our friend, the agent of Tours, some one or two and twenty years older than when we saw him last—was regularly installed in his *appartement garni*.

Good Mr. Sloake was as innocent of the ways of London as a child. It was "as good as a play" to see how he was knocked about in the streets, with what an air of gawkish surprise he gazed at the windows, and with what timidity he would steal into an eating-house, and take off his hat to the barmaid. Had he been in his teens, and come to London on a visit of juvenile curiosity, he could not have betrayed more apparent wonder and

strangeness. But it was only his nerves that were affected in this way. The noises and the crush of human beings stunned him—the glare of lights, and the costliness of the shops, dazzled him: that was all. His thoughts were elsewhere, and that helped to make him the more absent and awkward, and to expose him to a multiplicity of accidents. Hard was the fate that compelled him to forsake the grave of his beloved Eugénie, where, after five-and-twenty years of widowhood, his heart lay buried. But what alternative was left to him? The English colony, upon whose patronage he had subsisted, had gradually thinned and dispersed, and, few as were his wants, he was at last reduced to the extremity of distress. He struggled as long as he could to keep the poor shed from which he used to look out of a morning upon the solemn cathedral that enclosed the ashes of his beloved; but he struggled in vain. It was a choice between the living and the dead—between the dead Eugénie and the precious charge she had bequeathed to him in that heavy boy who had grown up into a sort of counterpart of himself, and who resembled him in everything but his quick affection, for Eugène was dull and unimpressionable, although quite as soft and tract-

able as his father. In this strait, being very ignorant of the world, and casting about on all sides for succour, poor Mr. Sloake bethought himself one morning of the generous Mr. Rawlings who, many years before, had so munificently rewarded his humble services. Since that time Mr. Rawlings had become a millionaire—his reputation in the money-market was European—his name was connected with great loans and enterprises: would he remember the poor agent who had transacted a little business so much to his satisfaction? would he give him other commissions, perhaps put him in the way of setting up again? above all, with the power he possessed, would he provide for the *pauvre petit*, who had no expectations, no profession, hardly any brains, and not a friend upon earth? That was the grand object of his solicitude. If he could see Eugène settled, he would die content; but he could not die and leave his boy alone in this desolate world. He dwelt upon the project day and night, until at last it took such possession of him, always looking at it in a favourable light, as to produce what seemed at first a cruel resolution to tear himself from Tours, and make a journey to England. He was many weeks revolving this step in his mind,

before he could summon up the requisite courage to carry it into effect. At length a day was settled on—a miserable, yet a hopeful day; and after a long night spent in prayers and tears over the grave of Eugénie, he turned to take his departure, and saw the last of the clumped roofs of Tours through the haze of a drizzling morning as he drifted down the waters of the Loire.

Mrs. Stubbs made a rapid acquaintance with his character. It was as transparent as glass. She had a great talent for making use of people—a talent which more enlarged minds look upon with much contempt, but which is singularly valuable to persons of a mean disposition. Now Mr. Sloake was the perfect pattern of a man to be made any use of she pleased. He never suspected anybody or anything—he believed everything he heard—he would do anything he was asked—he would tell anything he knew—in short, to employ a homely significant saying, you might turn him round your finger with the greatest ease in the world. Mrs. Stubbs, accordingly, did turn him round her finger; although it happened that she gained nothing by her dexterity in the end.

After making him wonderfully comfortable up-

stairs, and absolutely drawing tears into his eyes by her good-natured attentions, she invited him down to tea one evening, for the ostensible purpose of telling him everything she knew about Mr. Rawlings, and instructing him how and where he could obtain the much-desired interview with that gentleman. Mr. Sloake's ancient gallantry and tenderness revived under the influence of her kindness, and so, as the evening drew on, his heart opened wider and wider, and nothing would satisfy its yearnings short of relating to her, in turn, his own history, which he minutely detailed from his childhood to the very moment in which he spake. Their intimacy mellowed and ripened fast in the interchange of these genial confidences, and Mrs. Stubbs watched her opportunity to begin her revelations about Henry Winston, interesting his sympathies (which were always easily interested) in the first instance, and then proceeding from one particular to another, until she literally crammed him with all she knew about the young man, and a great deal more which she threw in by way of embellishment.

Mr. Sloake's feelings were painfully absorbed in this sad story—he pitied the youth sincerely—thought of his own son—offered up many a thanks-

giving to Heaven that had spared him such an affliction—and undertook to recount the whole affair to good Madame Rawlings, with such panegyrics upon the goodness of Mrs. Stubbs as, in the sincerity of his heart, he believed she deserved. He thought Mrs. Stubbs one of the best women in the world.

The next morning was decided upon for the visit to Park-lane, and a long consultation was held as to whether Mr. Sloake should take Eugène with him. He was strongly in favour of that measure himself, from a private conviction that the moment Mr. Rawlings should see the boy (now far advanced on the way to thirty), he would take such a fancy to him, that the fortune of the *pauvre petit* would be made for life. But Mrs. Stubbs opposed that course of proceeding. She didn't tell him exactly the reason why; she merely indicated that Mr. Rawlings was very much engaged, and that it would be only proper to defer to his convenience, and let him appoint his own time for seeing the dear boy. Mr. Sloake's innate modesty and self-depreciation acquiesced at once in this view of the affair, which gave him an exalted opinion of Mrs. Stubbs' prudence and delicate consideration for others.

At ten o'clock in the morning Mr. Sloake set forth on his expedition, with his heart full to overflowing. He was confident of a kind reception from the benevolent Mr. Rawlings, and, as he couldn't endure the thought of keeping Eugène in suspense as to the result of his interview, and was, moreover, very unwilling to leave the poor boy at home by himself, he took him all the way to Park-lane, where it was arranged that Eugène should wait outside till his father returned to communicate the happy tidings that were to bring their weary pilgrimage to a joyful termination. Eugène accordingly ensconced himself under the shadow of a wall out of sight, while Mr. Sloake ascended the steps to knock at the hall-door, not forgetting, at the same time, to make a triumphant gesture to his son. It was as much as to say, "Courage! *mon pauvre petit*. All our troubles are at an end at last!"

The door was opened by a grand livery servant, who stared rather impertinently at the visitor. Mr. Rawlings had all sorts of people calling upon him; but our lacquey had never seen such a person as Mr. Sloake before. It was Mr. Sloake's misfortune to



be helplessly ignorant of etiquette, especially in the matter of costume; and this morning, being greatly agitated by the prospect that lay before him, he was more careless than usual at his toilette, and, perhaps, never looked so negligent and slattern in all his life. It is the luck of these good, unworldly people to blunder away their opportunities.

"Is Mr. Rawling at home?" quietly inquired Mr. Sloake.

"I can't say," returned the gentleman in powder; "what is your business?"

"Ah, sir!" replied Mr. Sloake, "my business? I want to speak to my very good friend Mr. Rawling."

"Well, you'd better leave your message, and call some other time. He can't be seen now."

"Not now, sir? But I have come a long way to see him. It is not good for me to leave my message. I want to speak to him—I have a great many things to say to him. Message?—no—no. I must speak to himself."

"I tell you it's impossible this morning. What's your name?"

"Mr. Sloake is my name. If you tell him I come

from Tours, he will come and embrace me. Ah! my friend, if you knew what is at my heart, you would feel for me."

"Stuff! if you don't choose to leave your business, you must go without, that's all. It's no use, I tell you,—he's not to be interrupted, and I must shut the door."

"No, sir,—you will not shut the door upon my face. No—no,—you shall not;—where is Madame Rawling? She will never forget her uncle at Tours."

"Her uncle?"

"Yes, sir,—her uncle. Ah! you have an uncle yourself. *N'importe*—Madame will be very much *enragée* with you, if you shut the door upon my face, ha! ha!"

The lacquey, hardly knowing what to make of this appeal, and secretly impressed with rather a supercilious contempt on the score of birth for the family in which he was serving, thought the best thing he could do was to announce this strange visitor to his mistress. He accordingly admitted Mr. Sloake into the hall, and went up-stairs, with an insolent grin in the corners of his mouth, to tell Mrs. Rawlings that her uncle from Tours wanted to see her. The high-

bred town menial chuckled over the humiliation which he expected the turning up of such a beggarly relative would inflict upon the rich *parvenue*.

Mrs. Rawlings was in the drawing-room with her daughters. The announcement of her uncle from Tours produced a different effect from that which the footman had anticipated. It was received with a smile of good-humoured incredulity.

"You must have made a mistake, William," said the lady; "I have no uncle at Tours. Didn't the gentleman give his name?"

"Yes, ma'am,—he says his name is Sloake."

"Sloake? Sloake? What sort of person is he?"

"Well, ma'am, I can't say. I think myself he's a foreigner."

"Sloake? Oh! I have a glimmering of him now. Bless me! it can't surely be the same! Why, girls, this poor man—Sloake? Sloake?—to be sure, that was his name;—well, well, how very odd,—why it's upwards of twenty years,—what can he possibly want with me? Oh! I'll see the poor man by all means. Show him up."

And Mr. Sloake was shown up accordingly. The grandeur of the apartment dashed him a little; and his shyness was somewhat increased by discover-

ing three fine ladies in the room, not one of whom bore the slightest resemblance to the plain, homely Mrs. Rawlings he remembered at Tours, swathed in Scotch shawls, and carrying all manner of bundles on her lap in the Diligence. But Mrs. Rawlings remembered him at once. There was no forgetting the loose coat and great flapping trousers; and there was hardly any change in the mahogany hue of a face that seemed calculated to last as long as the hide of a tanner. His hair was not a whit thinner or greyer; and the only perceptible change that had taken place in him was an increased stoop he had contracted in his shoulders. In everything else he was the identical Mr. Sloake she recollected slouching along the streets of Tours.

Mrs. Rawlings motioned him to a chair, put him at his ease at once, by telling him that she remembered him quite well, and melted his heart by asking in the same breath after his son. Poor Mr. Sloake was at home in a moment, and ran into a long gabble about his affairs, and the object of his visit to England; in all of which Mrs. Rawlings expressed much concern, assuring him that she was confident Mr. Rawlings would do anything in his power to serve him, qualifying that assurance, however, by an ob-

servation which had now habitually found its way into all such promises, that Mr. Rawlings was absolutely overwhelmed with applications.

Mr. Sloake had spoken first of that which was uppermost in his mind, but he did not forget good Mrs. Stubbs, and bringing round the subject to his lodging in Duke-street, he opened with an eulogium on his landlady.

“ Ah ! that Madame Stubb—she feel for me—she make me comfortable—she is a good woman, that Madame Stubb—she love my poor Eugène—she feel for everybody.”

“ Indeed—never heard of her.”

“ *Mon Dieu!* You never heard of Madame Stubb ! She live at Duke-street. Ah ! madame, she was very kind to a friend of yours. You would never do too much for her if you knew what she do for Mr. Henry Winston,—she cry for him—she love him—it makes nothing for him now,—but Madame Stubb could tell you such a story of him. Ah ! *mon Dieu!* it is a wicked world !”

“ Henry Winston ?” exclaimed Margaret ; “ do you know him, sir ?”

“ No, mademoiselle ; but I live in his *appartement.*”

"I don't understand," said Margaret; "will you ask him, mamma, about Henry Winston," she added, in a whisper.

"We know Mr. Winston very well," observed Mrs. Rawlings; "I suppose you lodge in the same house where he lives."

"Yes, madame—what I mean, no. I live in his *appartement*,—he is gone—he will never return."

"Gone!" cried Clara, fixing her eyes upon Mr. Sloake. Margaret turned to her sister, as if she thought that Clara had the power to clear up the mystery.

"What does he mean, Clara?" she inquired.

"I know nothing of it," said Clara,—"*gone*? Did you say, sir, that Henry Winston was gone? You mean, he has left his lodgings?"

"Oh! yes, mademoiselle; certainly—*pauvre garçon*—my heart bleed to tell you."

Margaret looked alternately at her mother and Clara. She imagined that they knew more than they wished her to hear. But she could collect nothing from the expression of their faces; and when Mrs. Rawlings begged of Mr. Sloake to explain, she saw, from the eagerness of her manner, and from the earnest way in which Clara bent forward to listen,

that the intelligence was as strange to them as it was to her. Mr. Sloake went on with his story.

"*Pauvre garçon!* he was long time all wrong—would walk up and down, and in and out, and talk to himself; he lose his head, and good Madame Stubb watch him like a mother. It was love, madame, that make for him a great *bouleversement*. Ah! that love, madame—I could feel for him, when I pray at the grave of my Eugénie. Never, no more shall I see my Eugénie—but I see her in heaven! —*n'importe! n'importe!*"

"Go on, Mr. Sloake—go on," said Mrs. Rawlings. Margaret held her breath; there was a struggle at her heart of doubt and pride that sustained her through this lingering explanation.

"*Eh! bien*—he go away. His friend want him to stay here—no, he must go. He cannot stay in England, and he emigrate all the way over the sea to America."

"Emigrate to America, Mr. Sloake; surely there must be some mistake," cried Mrs. Rawlings.

"No, madame, it is very true. Madame Stubb think—she don't know exactly—she think the poor boy fight a duel one morning, when he go out with pistols."

"Oh, this is wild!" exclaimed Clara; "whom should he fight a duel with?"

"Ah! that is the grand secret, mademoiselle. I don't know—Madame Stubb knew that he love somebody, and that he take her off to America."

"She knows this?" demanded Clara.

"Certainly. Very good woman, Madame Stubb. She feel for him—she feel for my Eugène. She love Mr. Henry Winston, and want to stop him. *Trop tard! trop tard!* He will ship off at Liverpool, and Madame Stubb look in the journal every day for news of the young lady; but no, no news. She never heard no more of him since."

"Margaret," said Clara, drawing her sister away to the window, "do not believe this foolish old man. It is false, first and last. Henry Winston! oh, no—do not believe it."

"Answer me one question, Clara. I have stifled my heart rather than give you pain by telling you what I am enduring. Did you ever hear of this before, or of anything to lead you to suppose that there is any ground for it?"

"Never—and I do not credit one word of it."

"Then why have I never heard from him? What is the meaning of his silence? What has become of



him? What am I to think? What *can* I think, but that some change has taken place which, whatever it is, must separate us for ever?"

"To that, Margaret, I can say nothing. *If* he has changed, you should have better proof of it than such idle gossip as this."

"I have proof of it, Clara, in his silence. But I will wait—I will be patient. For *his* sake I could have suffered much without repining; but if I have cause to believe, as I do, that he is not the Henry Winston I once believed him, I will not break my heart." As she spoke, she drew up proudly, but the tears stood and glistened in her eyes. Clara was terribly shaken. She could not help feeling that Henry Winston ought to have taken some means of communicating with her or Margaret. She expected that he would have contrived to convey a message at least to her; and although she could not have delivered it to Margaret, it would have enabled her to speak more confidently about him. But his long silence, for upwards of a fortnight had now elapsed since she had seen him, deprived her of that last resource, and left her incapable of finding any satisfactory answer to the searching questions and womanly doubts of her sister.

While this little episode was taking place in the window, the conversation was still running on between Mr. Sloake and Mrs. Rawlings. Mr. Sloake was dwelling upon the virtues of Mrs. Stubbs, and all she had done for Henry Winston, when Margaret, resuming her place, quietly asked whether any members of Mr. Winston's family had been in town to inquire after him.

"No, mademoiselle. Mrs. Stubb expect somebody to come—but nobody ask for him."

"That is strange!" said Margaret.

"Don't you think," observed Mrs. Rawlings, "I had better write to Mrs. Winston? This is a most dreadful business."

"No, mamma," returned Margaret; "why should we interfere? This gentleman, perhaps, may learn something more, and let us know."

"I shall do everything I can for you," replied Mr. Sloake; "and I hope I may see my very good friend, Mr. Rawling. It is twenty—two—one year since I saw him. Very good for him all that time, very bad for me. But now I see him, the sun shall shine for me again and *mon pauvre petit*."

Excellent, trusting, hopeful Mr. Sloake! the

species to which you belong is growing very rare in England, and when we are fortunate enough to catch a specimen, we ought to make much of it. The thriving breeds of the Chippendales and Rawlingses will survive as long as there is a cinder left of the earth, and from our heart of hearts we hope they will not devour up all the Sloakes, but leave a few scattered over the surface, exemplifying to the end that innocent faith which finds it so hard to preserve its purity in this troublesome world of ours.

With many awkward bows, and lively protestations of gratitude, Mr. Sloake made his *adieu*, and sallied out into the street in search of his son. The ingenuous youth was still crouching under the wall faithful to the spot where his father had deposited him. When they met, the old man could hardly restrain himself from embracing him in the fulness of his joy.

"Ah, my child!" he exclaimed, putting his hands affectionately on his shoulders, "this is a blessed day for us. We shall never know grief nor poverty no more!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH DIMLY SHADOWS FORTH THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

SEVERAL weeks passed away, and nothing more was heard of Henry Winston. Worthy, quiet, persevering Mr. Sloake visited Park-lane regularly every day to communicate this important fact. Sometimes he saw Mrs. Rawlings, sometimes Margaret and Clara, sometimes nobody except the grand livery servant, with whom he always left a mysterious message, to the effect that there was "no news," which much perplexed that individual, who set every artifice at work to find out what it meant. But Mr. Sloake was too clever for him, and not to be entrapped by the confidential whisper he would drop into his ear, and the encouraging tone of voice with which he would hold him in conversation on the door-step. All this time Mr. Sloake was unfortunate enough to call just at the wrong moment to see

Mr. Rawlings, who was either down at the House, or in the city, or so engaged that he couldn't be seen; and, day after day, as he returned home with the same story to Mrs. Stubbs, that good lady's manner, at first so brisk and cordial, became gradually overcast and somewhat irritable. Mr. Sloake ascribed this to the interest she took in his welfare, and felt even more for the disappointment which he was sure she suffered on his account than he did for himself.

One morning there *was* a scrap of news—very slight, very tantalising, and leading to nothing; but Mr. Sloake was full of importance at having something to tell, and hastened to relate it to Mrs. Rawlings. Mr. Costigan had called in Duke-street to inquire after Henry Winston. Mrs. Stubbs thought this very odd. What could he expect to hear from her of Henry Winston, especially if that young gentleman had really gone to America? He could hardly have arrived there yet. She detected also a certain incoherence in Mr. Costigan's facts that increased her suspicions. He said he had been every day looking out for a letter, and, supposing it might be addressed to her house, he requested her, if it should come, to send it to him imme-

diately, to Gormley's Hotel, in Cecil-street, Strand. She thought it very strange that he should be looking out for a letter from a person who had only just set sail for America, and to satisfy her doubts, she went in the dusk of the evening to the hotel, where she learned, to her inexpressible astonishment, that letters were received there for Mr. Costigan, but that that gentleman was at present in Ireland. Putting these contradictory and very suspicious circumstances together in a shape eminently calculated to excite curiosity, she sent off Mr. Sloake the next morning to lay the case before Mrs. Rawlings. Mr. Sloake, for the life of him, could not help putting the best construction on the affair; but, in spite of his mild and palliating way of telling the story, he left Mrs. Rawlings involved in greater darkness and wonder than before.

As we are unwilling that any stigma should attach to Mr. Costigan on account of the evasive answer Mrs. Stubbs received at the hotel, we think it due to that gentleman to explain why it was given out that he was in Ireland, while he was actually marauding about the streets of London. The truth was, he was beginning to feel rather uneasy about the railroads. About this time the first symptoms of a

panic were breaking out in the busy hives of Moor-gate; the committees were issuing premonitory letters to their allottees; and Mr. Costigan considering, like many other noble gentlemen who flourished in that era of our history, that discretion was the better part of valour, thought it prudent to make himself "scarce," and to mystify all inquirers as to his whereabouts. There was nothing very remarkable in this proceeding after all, so far as Costigan was concerned; for nobody ever knew where he lived. He had always received his letters at Gormley's hotel; with only the slight difference on this occasion that, instead of getting them "the moment he came in," they were to be "forwarded" to him in Ireland—although he got them, for all that, as regularly and promptly as ever.

It is the easiest of all easy things to break the link by which two human hearts are united. The most trivial circumstance has been known to snap it, after it has stood the heaviest shocks. We suppose that its fragility is in proportion to its delicacy; and that the hearts the most capable of devotion and fidelity, are the most sensitive to wounds from those they love. There are men who will freely forgive an injury, but who never forgot an insult; and

there are women who will pardon the worst wrongs, but who are alienated for ever by the appearance of a slight. It is useless to reason about these matters. We cannot alter our natures—what we feel, we feel, and all that the severest discipline can do is to hide it from the world.

Who is there that has run through a few years of sweet and bitter experience that has not come to this conclusion at last? Who is there that has not sometimes been crushed by secret trials of this kind—deception and neglect, ingratitude and perfidy? Who has not fought this battle at the heart's core, and borne the unseen scars to the end of life? But let them lay up this consolation—that suffering is the great purifier and strengthener. If it beat down our outward strength, it gives us strength of a better kind—the strength of patience, of tempered judgment, and charity. How little are we aware, when we are passing through these cruel hours of agony inflicted upon us by those we love, that they will leave an abiding compensation behind in teaching us to bear and forbear, so that we may never inflict a like agony upon others. The heart weeps, but the soul looks out clearly through its tears.

Women bear such afflictions better than men.



They are more resigned—they have more hope and elasticity—they are sustained by a pride and consciousness of power that may deceive, but never deserts them. It is wonderful how they live through these struggles, sometimes without betraying their anguish !

A stranger could never have guessed the misery that was consuming the life of Margaret Rawlings. She was even gayer than usual—the effort to control herself forced her out of her ordinary quietude. She tried even to deceive Clara into the belief that she was not unhappy, and when they talked together about Henry Winston, she would laugh, turn it off, and speak of it as a foolish fancy, and say that she had grown wiser, and would think no more of him. Think no more of him ! She would have given worlds to have been able to think of him as she had done only a few weeks before.

The mystery of his disappearance—the obduracy or heartlessness of his silence—while they racked her with bitter pangs, fortified her also with strong excuses for endeavouring to forget him. Whatever had happened, he ought to have apprised her of his movements. But instead of showing an impatience to relieve her from the suspense which he must have

known she was suffering, he treated her with a callous indifference, that first ruffled her pride and then insensibly made her doubt his love. This impression deepened day by day, as week after week rolled by without bringing her a particle of intelligence.

At last there came a letter, at the end of five or six weeks, from Rose. With trembling and eager hands the seal was broken. How her heart throbbed as she ran over the well-known handwriting! The mystery was now about to be cleared up, and all the old love gushed back in a flood upon her. No! she never doubted him—he was still the same—it was only his impetuous spirit that had broken him down—he had been ill all this time—very ill, and more wretched than she was herself—and for that instant of time, she loved him—yes! she loved him as fondly as ever.

But it was only for an instant. She had not read three lines of the letter when a chill fell upon her. Could it be Rose Winston who wrote thus coldly and formally to her? She could scarcely believe it, and twenty times turned the letter over to look at the signature, to assure herself of the truth. The whole substance of the letter was simply to announce her approaching marriage, in fulfilment of a promise

she had given Margaret; and the communication was made with the most freezing courtesy, as if the writer was performing a task very much against her inclination. There was not a single allusion to the subsisting agreement between them, that Margaret was to be her bridesmaid, and Henry's name was not even mentioned from first to last.

When Margaret read this letter, which she did half a dozen times over, for it was very short, she felt as if she were doomed to have her affections blighted on all sides, and as if the beings she loved best in the world were all turning from her and deserting her. And Rose—to whom she had so trustingly confided her secret—that Rose should write to her thus! Who should she ever love again? Whose love should she ever believe in again? From that hour there was an aching void in her heart, never more to be filled up.

The coldness of Rose Winston pained her even more than the perfidy of Henry, which now admitted of no further doubt. In this case she had none of the resources of offended love to fall back upon:—those resources out of which we so often revive the lingering flame. Her spirit was bruised; and it needed all the indignant remonstrances Clara

could think of to make her feel that she ought to answer this letter in the same tone in which it was written. And such an answer was manufactured between them and despatched by the post. Clara wanted to throw in a little touch of sarcasm, but Margaret struck it out. She was too much hurt to indulge in recrimination. It was her first experience of the instability of friendship, and it had a desolating effect upon her feelings.

The despatch of that answer—worded with studied indifference—to her with whom she had grown up from childhood in bonds of the tenderest confidence and attachment, seemed to her to terminate all connexion between the two families. It was the dissolution of her earliest and fondest associations. Sometimes she fancied that Rose Winston would soften and relent, and write to her again, as she used to do, and explain away everything. But the correspondence dropped out; and the next tidings she heard of her was the announcement in the newspapers of her marriage with the Reverend Pearce Upton, who had been just presented to a living in Devonshire.

Clara saw that Margaret was sinking into a state of passive endurance. She felt that her own suffering was more keen and lacerating, for, notwithstand-

ing the strange conduct of Henry Winston, she could not relieve herself from the oppressive conviction that it originated in the fatal position in which her father had placed her towards her sister. This agonising feeling haunted her day and night. Society no longer held out the least charms for her. She shut herself up to brood over the sorrow that was prostrating her strength, and slowly preying upon her shattered health. She took to herself the whole blame of everything that had happened; and this unreasonable self-accusation did not lack a sufficient supply of distressing little incidents to aggravate its bitterness. A feeling of estrangement had crept into the family; they met, and exchanged cold courtesies; harshness and reserve had set in and displaced the affectionate greetings, and open confidences that used to give such zest, and freedom, and vivacity to their intercourse;—and poor Clara, with her shaken nerves and bleeding heart, yearning to disburden itself of its cruel secret, was borne down by that helpless remorse which upbraided her as the cause of all this unhappiness. Even the tranquillity into which Margaret had subsided—so calm on the surface, so troubled beneath—was a reproach to her. One word would unlock a load of misery; yet, could

she have spoken it, how unwise and dangerous it would be to utter that word, now that Margaret appeared to be reconciling herself to her fate. It was better as it was—better to leave things to take their course, than to disturb that serene resignation by awakening feelings that might only lead to a still more disastrous issue. So they seldom spoke of Henry Winston; and at length a tacit understanding seemed to grow up between them that it was a subject to be avoided, and in a little time his name was mentioned no more.

As for Margaret, the course of suffering through which she passed could have no other termination than a resolution to cast him from her memory. This is a kind of suffering which all young ladies are anxious to conceal. The conventions of society come to their help in these matters, and set up a hundred fallacies by which they dress their looks, and disguise a misery which vanity hints to them it would be humiliating to betray. And Margaret disguised it to a miracle. It was not merely that her pride was hurt, but that her opinion of the worthiness of her lover had undergone a revolution. When this change began to be wrought upon her in the first instance, her grief was intense; but as she accus-

tomed herself to contemplate the character of him she loved in a new and despicable aspect, her grief imperceptibly softened, and something like scorn and resentment came to her relief. She even tried to persuade herself that were he to return and sue to her again, she would sternly reject him. She really believed, notwithstanding many involuntary pangs, that she had succeeded in banishing him from her heart; but the dull, wasting ache she felt in that sensitive region, too plainly reminded her that if Henry was gone, he had left a sad and dreary void behind. Wrestling as she could with this total blight of her young hopes, she gradually sank into a condition of utter apathy. There was nothing in the world that either pleased or ruffled her. She moved through the routine of life with perfect indifference. The attentions of Lord Charles, which formerly fluttered and agitated her, produced no more effect upon her now than a breath of air whispering amongst her tresses.

Mr. Rawlings showed in this conjuncture a consummate knowledge of the plastic and tractable nature he had to deal with; nor, rigorous as he was, must we deny to him the merit of being actuated by some consideration for the feelings of his daughter.

In consequence of the discovery he had made in the suppressed letter, he suffered the week he had stipulated for her decision to pass over without any further allusion to her union. He saw that it would be injudicious to press such a measure at a moment when the state of her feelings might produce a revulsion that would probably drive her to extremities. He suffered a little time to elapse before he considered it prudent to renew the topic; and when it was renewed, instead of re-opening it himself, he made a crafty approach to his object through the agency of Mrs. Rawlings, who was commissioned to manage the matter in her own way. This was much more alarming and decisive than if he had taken it in his own hands, for the trepidation of that amiable wife and mother, placed as she was between the two parties, gave a colouring of fright to her expressions that considerably heightened the urgency of the appeal.

Urgent it undoubtedly was; for railway politics were beginning to look very gloomy; and, although Mr. Rawlings had made a stupendous fortune that lifted him above all apprehension about panics and bankruptcies, he was well aware that when the crash came, which he knew was coming, he would be exposed, from the conspicuous position he occu-



pied, to assaults and criminations from all quarters. It was of the utmost importance, therefore, to hasten the marriage with Lord Charles before these public disclosures should burst upon him; and he had already carried the preliminaries so far, in a conference with Lord William Eton, who gave him an interview very reluctantly, and only at the earnest entreaty of his nephew, as to arrange the amount of his daughter's fortune, including a liberal annuity, which was to be tied up and settled upon herself. There was nothing now wanted but the formal consent of the lady.

Margaret questioned her heart severely; she put it to the most searching tests. But of what avail were the hours of solitude she devoted to this hopeless inquisition? An abyss was between her and Henry Winston—they were never to meet again, or, if they did, to meet not as strangers, but as two persons who had reason to recoil from each other. What had she to live for, to care for, to love? What pleasure was there in her life that she should nourish it selfishly, and resist a sacrifice that was to make others happy—others, whom she was bound to honour and obey? And if this sacrifice was to be made, the kindness and forbearance of Lord Charles

Eton rendered it less harrowing than it might otherwise have been. The delicacy with which he had treated her all throughout deserved her gratitude, and his stainless character commanded her respect.

Love there was none. That was gone for ever. Her heart was empty, and gave forth a hollow answer to every question with which she probed it. For what purpose was she to hesitate any longer? Who was interested in her refusal? Who would suffer by her assent? Not one human being. Then there was the vindication of her slighted feelings—the assertion of a natural sentiment of outraged pride. She was woman enough to feel that—to be conscious of something like a slight thrill of revenge. But it had little weight in her final decision, for the idea had no sooner presented itself than she stifled it. She would not act upon that—she had loved Henry Winston too well, too deeply, to suffer such a thought to mingle with an act that was to divorce her from him for ever. The motive that decided her was her desolation. There was nothing left to cling to. All excuse or pretext for resistance was over. Why should she hesitate? Whichever way she turned, all was blank and lonely—this way at least would contribute to the

happiness of others; and for herself—herself! Oh! loveless life, what was there in it to shed one gleam of joy upon her path?

On a bright morning in the pleasant month of June, a crowd was collected about the pillars and portico of St. George's Church, Hanover-square, and a train of fashionable equipages blocked up the street. A ceremony was going forward within, the nature of which was indicated by the white favours that streamed from the hats and button-holes of the livery-servants who lolled round the carriages, showing off their wit and finery to the admiration of the by-standers. Presently a movement took place amongst those who were nearest to the door, and the people pressed back to make a lane for the approaching company. The door opened—every head was stretched forward—but it was only the beadle with a grand staff to clear the passage, an office which he discharged in a highly dignified manner. Then there was a low buzz and flutter outside, and those who could see into the church perceived that the ceremony was over, and that the bride and bridegroom were coming out at last. After a pause of a moment or two they appeared at the door—the steps of a carriage were instantly rattled down, and

the lady, closely veiled, to the great mortification of the curious spectators, was led hastily forward, and handed in. The whole progress of this interesting sight hardly occupied a second; and while the multitude were yet endeavouring to obtain a glimpse of the happy couple, the carriage which contained them vanished down the street.

There was a grand *déjeûner* that day in Park-lane; and when the health of the bride and bridegroom had been duly proposed and drunk, and sundry speeches were delivered, in which superhuman happiness was liberally prophesied as their unbroken lot through life, Lord and Lady Charles Eton bade adieu to their friends, and took their departure at a spanking pace to spend the honeymoon at Datchley.





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